

FIGHTING THE WAR AT HOME AND OVERSEAS: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN  
PRESS, THE *PITTSBURGH COURIER* AND THE LONG CIVIL RIGHTS  
MOVEMENT, 1920-1945

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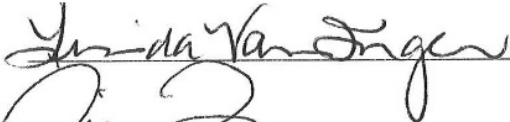
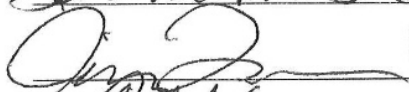
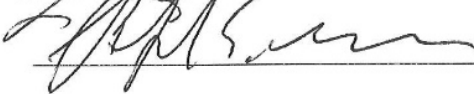
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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in History, University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Supervisory Committee

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11/19/18  
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## ABSTRACT

The long civil rights movement challenges the narrative that the civil rights movement began in 1954 with *Brown vs. Board of Education* and instead identifies its genesis in the 1930s. Jacqueline Dowd Hall attributes the long civil rights movement to the work of a union of radicals, labor activists, New Deal liberals, and African American activists. The staff of the hundreds of African-American newspapers across the nation deserve inclusion on this list as they used their platforms to advocate for equality and to provide a national identity to the African American community and the fight for civil rights.

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the African American press occupied a position of great influence within the African American community, reaching its zenith in World War II. African American newspapers not only reported the news but also advocated for social justice, with the Credo of the Negro Press defining African American journalists as crusaders, advocates, heralds, mirrors and record.

The African American press performed a pivotal role in the fight for civil rights during the twenty five years from the end of World War I to the end of World War II. The *Pittsburgh Courier* exemplifies this role as it advocated for political, social, and economic reform at home during the interwar years and then carried that advocacy overseas by dispatching accredited correspondents overseas during World War II to ensure that the fight for democracy at home continued while the fight for democracy overseas was won.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2004, historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall challenged the narrative that the civil rights movement is bounded by *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts in 1964 and 1965 respectively. In its place, she proposed that a long civil rights movement that “took root in the liberal and radical milieu of the late 1930s...accelerated during World War II...and in the 1960s and 1970s inspired a ‘movement of movements.’”<sup>1</sup> Hall attributes the genesis of this long civil rights movement to a national social movement that “rose from the caldron of Great Depression and crested in the 1940s...sparked by the alchemy of laborites, civil rights activists, progressive New Dealers, and black and white radicals.”<sup>2</sup> The publishers, editors, and journalists employed by hundreds of African American newspapers across the nation deserve explicit inclusion on this list as they played a critical role in sparking this movement and connecting it across the nation as they used their platforms to advocate for equality.

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the African American press occupied a position of great influence within the African American community. African Americans viewed the mainstream press with distrust and expected African American newspapers to report the news and highlight the impact to African Americans.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History* vol. 91 (March 2005), 1234-1235.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, 1245.

<sup>3</sup> Charles A. Simmons, *The African American Press With Special Reference to Four Newspapers, 1827-1965* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1998), 71-72.

journalists and editorial staffs at African American newspapers across the country not only reported the news but also served as social justice advocates.<sup>4</sup> The influence of the African American press reached its zenith in World War II, reflected by the creation and advocacy of the Double-V campaign, a commitment by African Americans to support victory over the Axis overseas and victory over racial oppression in the United States.<sup>5</sup> A small group of accredited war correspondents represented the African American press overseas during World War II.<sup>6</sup>

This paper examines the role that the African American press in general, and the *Pittsburgh Courier* specifically, served in the fight for civil rights from 1920 to 1945. The *Pittsburgh Courier* is acknowledged by scholars of the African American press such as Patrick Washburn, Mark Whitaker, and Mark Slagle as the most influential and most-widely circulated African American newspaper of the 1930s and 1940s. Founded in 1907, the driving force behind the *Courier*, Robert L. Vann, assumed the role of editor in 1910. Vann, born in North Carolina in 1879, moved Pittsburgh in 1903 to earn a law degree from Western Pennsylvania University. Initially seeking to fill a gap in African American news for Pittsburgh's growing African American community, by 1915 Vann directed the *Courier* towards advocacy for social reform. In the 1920s, Vann

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<sup>4</sup> Charles G. Spellman "The Black Press: Setting the Political Agenda during World War II," *Negro History Bulletin* vol. 51, no. 1-12 (December 1993), 38.

<sup>5</sup> Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press during World War II* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc, 1975), 88-89.

<sup>6</sup> Jinx Coleman Broussard, *African American Foreign Correspondents: A History* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), Kindle edition, location 2312.

demonstrated his commitment to the ideal of creating social and economic mobility for African Americans. By 1926, the *Courier* published a national edition and established branch offices in Philadelphia and New York City. Robert Vann became the majority owner of the *Courier* and launched a three-year project build its own print plant, at a cost of more than \$100,000. In the 1930s, Vann continued to establish the *Courier* as a national newspaper, producing a local and three national editions and distributing in all 48 states and several foreign countries. By Vann's death in 1940, the *Courier* was well-established as an advocate for racial equality and a leading voice for the African American community.<sup>7</sup>

In 1943, P. Bernard Young, Jr., publisher and editor-in-chief of the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* wrote the Credo for the Negro Press that defined the professional roles of African Americans journalists. According to the Credo, African-American journalists would "...CRUSADE for all things that are right and just and I will with equal fervor, expose and condemn all things that are unjust...I shall be an ADVOCATE of the full practice of the principles implicit in 'Life, Liberty, and Justice For All.' I shall be an ADVOCATE for these human and civil rights on behalf of those to whom they are denied and I shall turn the pitiless light of publicity upon all men who would deny these rights to others...I shall be a HERALD, a bearer of good news, whenever I may, but of all news, whether it be good or bad...I shall be a MIRROR AND A RECORD-a MIRROR of our existence as it is and a RECORD of our strivings to better that lot."<sup>8</sup> By

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Buni, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), 3, 29, 36, 42-47, 61, 113-114, 171-172, 222-223, 257, 321.,

<sup>8</sup> P. Bernard Young, Jr., "Credo for the Negro Press" *The Crisis*, August 1944, 271.



conducting a textual content analysis of articles printed in the *Pittsburgh Courier* from 1920 to 1945, it is clear that the *Pittsburgh Courier* fulfilled the roles described in the Credo of the Negro Press.

The African American press' effort were critical in establishing the first phase of the long civil rights movement. The *Courier* advocated for equal treatment and opportunity for African Americans and reported on the efforts and accomplishments of activists seeking to improve conditions. The *Courier* also published articles critical of discriminatory policies and practices. Finally, the *Courier* joined other major African American newspapers in linking the fights for equal rights in thousands of communities across the nation into one large battle for equality in America. A small handful of journalists traveled overseas with African American soldiers to carry on the fight for equal rights. These correspondents reported events to provide a linkage between African American service members serving overseas and the subscribers in the United States. They also actively sought to generate and maintain support from the African American community for the war against the Axis. However, despite observing the implementation of policies and practices that were discriminatory to African Americans, the *Courier's* war correspondents offered little criticism of these inequality.

Mary Dudziak contends that the civil rights reform of the 1950s and 1960s was a product of the Cold War because racial discrimination in the United States challenged the ability of the nation to promote democracy overseas. However, the dynamic of the Cold War resulted in limited civil rights reform, within the bounds of the image that US government desired to project to other nations. Dudziak charges that these limitations

prevented any attempt at broad social reform.<sup>9</sup> Dudziak points to the attention paid to race relations in the United States by newspapers in multiple nations as evidence of the pressure placed upon US foreign policy at the beginning of the Cold War. She cites reporting in European press in Great Britain and Greece, propaganda published by Soviet newspaper *Tass*, as well as reporting from Fiji, Sri Lanka, India, China, and the Philippines and US diplomatic cables to establish that US politicians and diplomats felt that the focus on racial discrimination undermined the United States' prestige abroad.<sup>10</sup> While Dudziak makes a convincing argument of the importance of the press in creating conditions in which civil rights reform became an imperative for the US government, the African American press' role is equally important in the decades prior to the Cold War.

This study seeks to contribute to the scholarship of the long civil rights movement and the African American press by examining the role of the African American press in establishing the initial stages of the movement between 1920 and 1945. Analysis of the objectives and effects that African American journalists had will improve understanding of how and if the African American press balanced the demands of journalism with the requirements of civil rights activism. Chapter 1 of this study explores the role of the African American press in advocating for social change during the interwar period. Chapter 2 examines the objectives and methods of the African American press at the onset of World War II and how it was impacted by US government policies. Chapter 3 examines the roles of the war correspondents for the *Pittsburgh Courier* within the

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<sup>9</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Kindle edition, locations 368-382.

<sup>10</sup> Dudziak, locations 626-805.

context of the *Courier's* role as a leading advocate of social change in the African American community and as a vocal critic of government policies.

An examination of the African American press requires placing it within the larger context of American journalism. In *Covering America*, Christopher Daly offers a broad overview of the historical role of journalism in America. Daly embraces the role of journalism as the fourth estate, characterizing its primary functions as providing a forum for political debate, organizing political parties, and exposing corruption. He identifies three distinct traditions of American journalism. These traditions include advocacy in which journalists use evidence, rhetoric, and polemic to influence readers, the reporting tradition is characterized by journalists who seek to explain the world to their audience through the empirical gathering of facts and truths, and the exposé tradition, in which journalists seek to spur their audience into taking action by exposing misconduct, corruption, and abuse.<sup>11</sup> Daly also identifies two significant challenges that the American press has faced: first, managing the tension between the profession of journalism and the business of journalism and second, many journalists do not achieve or even aspire to any level of objectivity.<sup>12</sup>

Michael Schudson examines the nature of objectivity in journalism in *Discovering the News*. Schudson contends that the idea of objective journalism is a twentieth century reaction to the efforts of the United States government to manipulate reporting of the news.<sup>13</sup> He lays out a complex causal chain to support this view, starting with the rise of

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher Daly, *Covering America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 3-5.

<sup>12</sup> Daly, ix, 6.

public relations with its emphasis on reporting selected news stories in order to influence public opinion. Schudson then describes an increase in subjective reporting as journalists sought to not only report what events happened but to also explain why they were happening.<sup>14</sup> He concludes by detailing how the US government's increasing efforts to control the dissemination of news during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly during World War I, led to calls for the professionalization of journalism and the adoption of objectivity as a professional value.<sup>15</sup>

In *Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime*, Geoffrey Stone also decries the US government's tendency to overreact to perceived security threats and seek increased control over information during times of war.<sup>16</sup> Stone examines the friction between the government and those who publicly dissent with government policies. He concludes that during times of war, US presidents acted aggressively to limit political dissent, however, the Supreme Court consistently acted to uphold the rights of dissenters to voice their views.<sup>17</sup> During World War II, Stone cites the actions of Attorney General Francis Biddle as instrumental in forcing the government to exercise restraint.<sup>18</sup>

Don Pember's *The Smith Act as a Restraint on the Press* examines the legal

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 9-10.

<sup>14</sup> Schudson, 124-129, 134-135.

<sup>15</sup> Schudson, 141-144 and

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Stone, *Perilous Times: Freedom of Speech in Wartime* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Stone, 284.

<sup>18</sup> Stone, 308-310.

context in which the government sought to suppress dissenting views during World War II. Emerging as a culmination of efforts during the inter-war period to enact a sedition law during peacetime, the Alien Registration Act of 1940, also known as the Smith Act, prohibited any attempt to subvert the loyalty of members of the US Armed Forces or advocate violent overthrow of the government.<sup>19</sup> The Smith Act became primarily a tool in the US government's attempts to prevent the spread of Socialist and Communist doctrine with the act of writing, printing, and circulating articles and editorials often serving as the basis for prosecution under the Smith Act.<sup>20</sup> Pember contends that the Justice Department's use of the Smith Act served as a restraint on the press due to the chilling effect that it produced on those who became reluctant to make any attempt to publish criticism of the government.<sup>21</sup> It is doubtful if the Smith Act had a significant impact on World War II journalism. As Pember points out, though the first prosecutions under the Smith Act occurred in 1943, it did not become a significant tool for the Justice Department until 1949.<sup>22</sup>

While the Smith Act may have had negligible impact on information control during World War II, Allan Winkler and Michael Sweeney present studies of the government agencies charged with controlling and influencing information during the war. Winkler's study of the Office of War Information (OWI), *The Politics of*

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<sup>19</sup> Donald Pember, *The Smith Act as a Restraint on the Press* (Columbia: Association for Education in Journalism, 1969), 4-5.

<sup>20</sup> Pember, 10, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Pember, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Pember, 2.

*Propaganda*, details the struggles of the OWI to execute a coordinated propaganda campaign designed to not only assist in winning World War II but also in laying the foundation for the aftermath of the war.<sup>23</sup> While World War I left a great public distrust of any governmental propaganda operations, Winkler's work clearly identifies the greatest challenge that the OWI faced was the competing views and operations of other governmental agencies. Despite the OWI's mandate to coordinate the information activities of all federal agencies, the OWI faced significant competition from the State Department, War Department, and the Department of the Navy, all of which viewed propaganda operations as of limited value.<sup>24</sup> The OWI found itself occupied primarily occupied with combatting Axis propaganda as well as undesired images of the United States coming from Hollywood productions.<sup>25</sup>

In *The Military and the Press*, Michael Sweeney surveys the relationship between the American press and the United States military from the Mexican-American War to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Sweeney contends that this relationship is characterized by the pursuit of differing agendas by the press and the military. The press sought both commercial success and to inform the American public while the military viewed the news as a key lever in influencing both the levels of public and political support and troop morale and sought to exert as much control over this level as possible.<sup>26</sup> While the

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<sup>23</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Winkler, 150.

<sup>25</sup> Winkler, 154.

postmaster general and Office of War Information were the primary federal agencies that exercised control over domestic press during World War II, the military exerted control over news originating from the theaters of war. One form of control that the military utilized was censorship. Similar to domestic censorship operations, the press willingly agreed to the censorship demands of the military. These demands, documented in *The Code of Wartime Practices for the American Press*, included limited reporting of troop, plane, and ship locations and movements; information on fortifications; any weather information that could provide an advantage to the enemy; and photographs and maps of military areas.<sup>27</sup> Military censors also viewed any reports about problems between American forces and Allied forces and racial tensions within American forces as sensitive topics.<sup>28</sup>

In *The Secrets of Victory*, Michael Sweeney attempts to explain why the Office of Censorship succeeded in exerting control over the domestic press.<sup>29</sup> Sweeney points to the Office of Censorship's decision to persuade the domestic press to voluntarily engage in self-censorship rather than attempt to compel compliance. The Office of Censorship skillfully bridged the gap between the competing interests of journalists and the departments of the federal government. The Office of Censorship appealed to the patriotism of journalists while demonstrating transparency and good faith by pressuring

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Sweeney, *The Military and the Press* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Sweeney, *The Military and the Press*, 70-75.

<sup>28</sup> Sweeney, *The Military and the Press*, 104.

<sup>29</sup> Michael S. Sweeney, *The Secrets of Victory* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 3.

military officials to only withhold information with certain security value and making no attempts to censor editorial opinions or criticism of the administration.<sup>30</sup>

The African American press also voluntarily acceded to the Office of Censorship's censorship guidelines, just as its mainstream counterparts did.<sup>31</sup> However, the African American press occupied a unique niche in American journalism that requires exploration. In 1997, Howard University's Moorland-Springarn Research Center published *A History of the Black Press* written by Armistead S. Pride and Clinton C. Wilson. Pride wrote most of the manuscript before his death in 1991 and Wilson finished it. Although *A History of the Black Press* chronicles the development of the African American press primarily from a regional standpoint, Pride and Wilson do describe the efforts of the leaders of African American print journalism to unite and establish a national identity. They also briefly examine the role of radio, television, advertising, and magazines.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately this work demonstrates how the African American press did not evolve in a monolithic fashion, but rather as hundreds of instances in African American communities across the United States.

Roland Wolseley traces the history of African American print journalism from its inception in 1827 to the 1970s in *The Black Press, U.S.A.* First published in 1971 and

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<sup>30</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 6, 213-216.

<sup>31</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 92.

<sup>32</sup> Harry Amana, review of *A History of the Black Press* by Armistead S. Pride and Curtis C. Wilson II, *Chickenbones: A Journal for Literary and Artistic African-American Themes* accessed April 12, 2015 (<http://www.nathanielturner.com/historyblackpress.htm>).



then printed in a second edition in 1990, Wolseley sought to record the history and nature of the African American press in order to preserve it as part of the development of the modern American national identity.<sup>33</sup> *The Black Press, U.S.A.* defines the African American press as newspapers predominantly owned by African Americans, that targeted African Americans, and sought to serve, speak for, and fight for the African American community. His examination of the history of the African American press revealed three consistent themes over time, driven by what he called a mandate that extended beyond profitability to advocacy. These enduring themes were the state of race relations, the achievements of African Americans, and maintaining linkages to the African American community's African heritage.<sup>34</sup>

In *The Negro Press Re-examined: Political Content of Leading Negro Newspapers*, Maxwell R. Brooks characterized the African American press as second only to the church in influence in the African American community. The period between the world wars saw an increase in professionalization of the African American press due to an increase in trained journalists, capital investment, and increasing circulation. Brooks classified three types of African American newspapers: a half-dozen national newspapers, about twenty regional newspapers with circulations between 10,000 and 50,000, and a large number of community-based newspapers.<sup>35</sup> Based upon his analysis of five major African American newspapers conducted following World War II, Brooks concluded that

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<sup>33</sup> Roland Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), xv.

<sup>34</sup> Wolseley, xvi-xxiv.

<sup>35</sup> Maxwell R. Brooks, *The Negro Press Re-examined* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1959), 12-14.

the African American press reflected middle-class ideals and, as instruments of reforms, demonstrated a steadfast belief that the path to equality for African Americans lay in the instruments of American democracy.<sup>36</sup> Brooks also points out that liberal mainstream publications also engaged in frequent criticisms of American racial policies during the 1940s and sensationalist journalism was a common practice for many urban newspapers from both the mainstream and African American press.<sup>37</sup>

Charles Simmons's *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage during National Crises, With Special Reference to Four Black Newspapers, 1827-1965* presents a broad examination of the development of the African American press through nine separate periods. Simmons classifies World War II as the sixth of these nine periods and argues that during this period the African American press banded together to present a united front and achieved unified action on race issues that they had been unable to accomplish before that.<sup>38</sup> African American newspapers and journalists navigated the delicate balance between the interests of advertisers, subscribers and government pressure to support the war effort by adopting a benevolent militancy committed to fulfilling the expectations of their subscribers without driving away advertisers or risking government action. Subscribers expected the African American press to present counterpoints to stories involving or impacting African Americans in mainstream

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<sup>36</sup> Brooks, 98-102.

<sup>37</sup> Brooks, 21, 71.

<sup>38</sup> Charles A. Simmons, *The African American Press With Special Reference to Four Newspapers, 1827-1965* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1998), 1-2.

American newspapers, which they mistrusted.<sup>39</sup> Simmons posits that the African American press during World War II pursued an editorial philosophy that remained unchanged from that of the original founders of the African American press in the 1820s.<sup>40</sup>

*The African American Press: Voice for Freedom*, written by Patrick Washburn and published in 2006, examines the development of the African American press from the 1820s to the 1980s. Washburn classifies the African American press as an advocacy press that intentionally blurred the lines between fact, opinion and commentary for effect.<sup>41</sup> He argues that the first half of the twentieth century, culminating with World War II, represented the height of influence of the African American press. Washburn finds that the African American press, rather than just reacting to the desires of their subscribers, led the African American community in the fight for equality, setting the stage for the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>42</sup>

While the myriad of newspapers that made up the African American press shared a common role as advocates for civil rights, they sometimes struggled to present a common front. In *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps*, Donald Ritchie describes both the external and internal struggles as the wartime

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<sup>39</sup> Simmons, 71-72.

<sup>40</sup> Simmons, 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), xvi.

<sup>42</sup> Washburn, 3-6.

African American press sought to integrate the Washington Press Corps.<sup>43</sup> The divisions in the African American press were fueled by competition for readers and revenue. The Washington Press Corps' access to politicians and members of the Roosevelt administration made admission to its ranks extremely valuable. The Washington Press Corps maintained a requirement that its members represent daily newspapers, a standard that, when combined with the cost of maintaining an office in Washington DC, effectively excluded African American newspapers. In 1944, the Roosevelt administration reached a political agreement with the African American press to admit African American journalist Harry McAlpin to the Washington Press Corps. McAlpin would ostensibly represent the *Atlanta Daily World*, one of the only African American daily newspapers, however in actuality he serviced a conglomeration of African American newspapers. This long-sought after settlement nevertheless was undone by a disagreement between the African American newspapers involved.<sup>44</sup>

Howard Sitkoff attributed the rising influence of the African American press in the 1930s and 1940s to its ability to capitalize on a growing social movement as African Americans experienced increased expectations and decreased political agency.<sup>45</sup> The *Pittsburgh Courier* became one of the first African American newspapers to reject those in the African American community that advocated for Booker T. Washington's version

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<sup>43</sup> Donald Ritchie, "Race, Rules, and Reporting," in *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 28.

<sup>44</sup> Ritchie, 29-33.

<sup>45</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), xx.

of accommodationism. The *Courier* and the *Chicago Defender* also led the movement to overcome the African American community's distrust of the Socialist Party and support labor organizations, such as the Congress of Industrial Organizations, that included opposition to racial injustice as part of their platforms.<sup>46</sup> African American publishers such as Robert L. Vann, owner of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, were leading advocates urging the African American community to utilize the political capital that African American votes offered rather than continue with traditional political loyalties.<sup>47</sup>

The most recent study of the African American press is *The African American Press during World War II*. Written by Paul Alkebulan in 2014, *The African American Press during World War II* contends that the African American press reflected the aspirations of the African American population and served as an advocate for full democracy. Leaders of the African American community defined the path to full democracy as the end of the practice of segregation, enfranchisement of African Americans in the South, integration of the military, fairness in the judicial system, and improvement of African American economic prospects.<sup>48</sup> Journalists in the African American press served as civil rights advocates as well as reporting the activities of African American service members in every theater of the war and progress or setbacks in the fight for civil rights.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Sitkoff, 135-138, 182.

<sup>47</sup> Sitkoff, 65, 225-229.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Alkebulan, *The African American Press in World War II: Toward Victory at Home and Abroad* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Alkebulan, 53.

Lee Finkle authored *Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II*, published in 1975. *Forum for Protest* argues that the African American press pursued a relatively conservative agenda for race relations in America. Characterizing the African American press as assimilationists that were not interested in radical or revolutionary action, Finkle contends that the African American press sought to rally the support of African Americans to the war effort by linking support for the war to potential civil rights gains after the war.<sup>50</sup> Finkle concludes that while the African American press performed essential services for the African American community, it utilized militant rhetoric to advance conservative policies that were essentially unchanged since the Civil War, despite indications that large segments of the African American community were in favor of more radical action.<sup>51</sup>

Gene Roberts Jr. and Hank Klibanoff's Pulitzer Prize winning study, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* pointed towards the increase of news coverage of racial discrimination as one of the causes for the growth of the civil rights movements. *The Race Beat* built upon the work of sociologist Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*. Myrdal wrote that discrimination against African Americans violated the distinct American values of equality and fairness. He claimed that these discriminatory practices continued because of a lack of knowledge of their extent among the American public.<sup>52</sup> The African American press provided

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<sup>50</sup> Finkle, 114.

<sup>51</sup> Finkle, 221-222.

<sup>52</sup> Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 9-12.

freedom of expression not available to African American citizens, particularly in the South. African American journalists used this freedom of expression to establish a tradition of protest, however, the short life span and local nature of most African American newspapers limited their influence.<sup>53</sup> For the first half of the twentieth century, African American newspapers faced several challenges, from conflicts between patriotism and activism during the World Wars to resisting the urge to engage in the type of yellow journalism popularized by the Hearst newspapers.<sup>54</sup> In the 1940s, the African American press chose to pursue social activism, to the dismay of both the US government, who felt that the focus on ending segregation detracted from the war effort, and prominent mainstream editors who felt that ending segregation was a drastic overreach.<sup>55</sup>

Patrick Washburn closely examines the intersection of the African American press's social activism and the Roosevelt administration's efforts to rally public support for the war effort. In *A Question of Sedition*, Washburn asserts that the African American press faced a real threat of suppression from the federal government during World War II until Attorney General Francis Biddle decided in the summer of 1942 that the federal government would not indict any African American publishers for sedition during the war. Biddle decided this despite concern by members of the Roosevelt administration that grounds existed for sedition charges against the African American press due to what they

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<sup>53</sup> Roberts and Klibanoff, 8.

<sup>54</sup> Roberts and Klibanoff, 20-24.

<sup>55</sup> Roberts and Klibanoff, 29-31.

considered biased and inaccurate reporting. In fact, seven separate federal agencies investigated major African American newspapers including the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the Post Office, the Office of War Information, and the US Army. Undoubtedly part of the motivation for Biddle's decision not to pursue legal action was the risk of further decreasing the African American community's support for the war.<sup>56</sup>

A form of control that the US government, particularly the military, exercised over the press was the accreditation of and support provided to war correspondents. Journalists seeking accreditation as war correspondents had to submit to government scrutiny of their background, opinions on the war, and assessment of their reliability. Once accredited, the US military provided transportation to the war zone, lodging and transportation within the war zone, and access to troops and units. While the US military accredited more than 1,600 war correspondents and censors cleared most of the stories and photographs submitted for review, the relationship between the military and the press depended on the view of the theater commander. General Dwight Eisenhower embraced print and broadcast journalists and afforded them great latitude. Commanders in the Mediterranean and China-Burma-India theaters also exhibited permissive policies with the press. On the other hand, in the Pacific Theater, General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters imposed greater restrictions on the press, requiring correspondents to emphasize successful military operations and deemphasize friendly casualties.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Patrick Washburn, *A Question of Sedition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 5-9.

<sup>57</sup> Sweeney, *The Military and the Press*, 98-99, 106.



An examination of the robust historiography of war correspondents in the American press reveals their central role in carrying news of the war to the home front. John Hohenberg's *Foreign Correspondents: The Great Reporters and their Times* chronicles the history of foreign correspondents from the American Revolution to the Persian Gulf War in 1991.<sup>58</sup> He contends that a small number of journalists who have risked their lives to report on wars almost always manage to maintain journalistic integrity despite government pressure, military censorship and enemy fire.<sup>59</sup> Hohenberg focuses on the American and British press, citing these nations as the best examples of the relationship between journalists, society and the government required to sustain an independent press that greatly benefits the citizens of democratic nations.<sup>60</sup>

In 1975, decorated British journalist Phillip Knightley wrote *The First Casualty*. Knightley used this chronological examination of war correspondents from the 1850s to 1970s to examine the tension between journalism and government efforts to control information.<sup>61</sup> Knightley presents a chronological narrative of the exploits of western war correspondents starting with the Crimean War and ending with the Vietnam War. He identifies British journalists during the Crimean War as the origin of the modern war correspondent.<sup>62</sup> The book's subtitle, *The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, or*

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<sup>58</sup> John Hohenberg, *Foreign Correspondence: The Great Reporters and their Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 1-4.

<sup>59</sup> Hohenberg, xi.

<sup>60</sup> Hohenberg, xii.

<sup>61</sup> Phillip Knightley.com, accessed April 12, 2015 (<http://phillipknightley.com/about/>).

*Myth-Maker* demonstrates Knightley's contention that not all war correspondents were able to maintain their independence and integrity.

Nathaniel Lande narrows his focus to American war correspondents in *Dispatches from the Front: A History of the American War Correspondent*. Lande, whose career includes work in television, film and radio as well as appointments as a professor at several universities, utilizes articles and dispatches from American war correspondents to demonstrate how warfare and the war correspondent evolve over the course of ten armed conflicts from the Revolutionary War to the Persian Gulf War.<sup>63</sup> In his introduction, Lande states that he sought to illustrate how the relationship between changes in the means by which correspondents report war and the type of reporting demanded by the American public demonstrates the connection between war and American society. *Dispatches from the Front* contends that the American people have demonstrated a strong desire for investigative reporting, narrative, descriptive journalism, and historical reporting that establishes larger context of specific events.<sup>64</sup>

Robert H. Patton surveys the first generations of American war correspondents in *Hell Before Breakfast*. Patton traces the development of war correspondents over a fifty-year period from the 1854 to 1912, using the words of a handful of war correspondents across this period to describe their accomplishments. Although Patton details the correspondents' coverage of conflicts such as the American Civil War, the Franco-

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<sup>62</sup> Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty* (New York: Harvest Books, 1975), 4.

<sup>63</sup> Nathaniel Lande, *Dispatches from the Front: A History of the American War Correspondent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), ix.

<sup>64</sup> Lande, x-xi.

Prussian War and the Russo-Turkish War, he also delves into their coverage of events such as the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, a Russian punitive expedition into Uzbekistan, and Henry Stanley's famed search of Africa for Doctor David Livingstone. Patton points to advances in telecommunications that enabled daily reporting as the key factor in the rise in prominence of war correspondents who were able to exert influence over public opinion. He also highlights the competition between the New York *Tribune* and *Herald* and credits the innovativeness and instincts of the publishers and correspondents of both papers for identifying key points of friction in international affairs.<sup>65</sup>

*Reporting America at War* narrows the scope of examining the history of American war correspondents by focusing on American journalists who served as correspondents since the 1930s. This book, a companion piece to a PBS documentary film of the same name, presents the oral history interviews of fourteen war correspondents to illustrate their experiences. The director of the documentary, Stephen Ives, states that these oral histories also demonstrate how the increasingly restrictive policies of the government towards the press in the 1980s and 1990s greatly reduced expectations of the American public on the level of reporting that the press will provide during war.<sup>66</sup> In his introductory essay, historian and journalism professor James Tobin, asserts that the oral histories of these war correspondents show how their work influenced

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<sup>65</sup> Robert H. Patton, *Hell Before Breakfast* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), xv-xvi.

<sup>66</sup> Michelle Ferrari, compiler, *Reporting America at War: An Oral History* (New York: Hyperion Book, 2003), viii.

America's perception of war and how the American public feels about the use of war as an instrument of national policy.<sup>67</sup>

The more than 1,600 accredited war correspondents did not serve as the only source of war news during World War II. As M. L. Stein describes in *Under Fire*, the military services themselves offered war reporting focused on maintaining troop morale. The two primary venues for this reporting came from the military daily newspaper, *Stars & Stripes*, and the weekly news magazine *Yank*. Both *Stars & Stripes* and *Yank* sought to provide news for soldiers reported by soldiers and offered a different perspective as their reporters lived with enlisted soldiers while war correspondents from newspapers and radio lived and traveled with officers due to the honorary officer rank bestowed upon them after accreditation.<sup>68</sup> The War Department also commissioned a group of more than forty artists to produce a pictorial history of World War II and capture the lot of the everyday soldier. While *Life* magazine took over this project when the War Department cut its funding, it demonstrated another way in which the military sought to exert as much control as possible over the news coming from the front.<sup>69</sup>

Joseph J. Mathews further illustrates the complex apparatus utilized to provide news from the theater of war to the homefront. He characterizes World War II journalism as efforts to publish news that the public would consider useful while avoiding publishing

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<sup>67</sup> Ferrari, 2.

<sup>68</sup> M. L. Stein, *Under Fire: The Story of American War Correspondents* (New York: Julian Messner, 1995), 77-79.

<sup>69</sup> Stein, 107-108.

any news that could harm public support for the war.<sup>70</sup> Reporting war news required the synchronization of actions of war correspondents, public relations staff, and news releases from theater headquarters. This synchronization process even extended to the practice of rehearsing censorship guidelines before major military operations.<sup>71</sup>

Douglas Kellner identifies three general roles for war correspondents. The first role is an objective conduit of information by describing military actions and briefings. The second role is critical correspondent who conducts independent investigations and seeks to disprove any inaccurate official reports. The third role is propagandist who transmits propaganda and sometimes or false information.<sup>72</sup>

While less than three percent of the war correspondents accredited during World War II represented the African American press, this small group of approximately thirty correspondents had an impact disproportionate to their numbers. Two authors dominate the examination of the war correspondents for African American newspapers. John Stevens authored *From the Back of the Foxhole: Black Correspondents in World War II* in 1973. Stevens examines the work of twenty-seven African American war correspondents and contends that these journalists had two distinct roles: to report on the progress of the war and to report on the lives of African American service members fighting the war, particularly any racial discrimination that they faced.<sup>73</sup> Stevens also

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<sup>70</sup> Joseph J. Mathews, *Reporting the Wars* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), 170.

<sup>71</sup> Mathews, 192-193.

<sup>72</sup> Douglas Kellner “War Correspondents, the Military, and Propaganda: Some Critical Reflections,” *International Journal of Communications* vol. 2 (2008), 300.

posits that war correspondents' practice of lavishing praise onto African American units developed a level of expectations that became impossible for African American soldiers to meet.<sup>74</sup> While the correspondents of the *Courier* certainly used hyperbolic language that often exaggerated the accomplishments of African American units, the increased opportunities afforded to African Americans servicemembers as the war progressed seems counter to an idea of unmet expectations.

In a journal article, "Black Correspondents of World War II Cover the Supply Routes," Stevens describes the efforts of war correspondents from African American newspapers in weathering hardships in order to highlight the accomplishments of African American service troops engaged in building and operating supply routes over treacherous terrain in Iran, Burma and Alaska. Stevens explains that these African American soldiers performed well despite their preference for combat assignments. The war correspondents that provided press coverage of their actions also coveted assignments covering combat operations but ensured that the public was aware of the accomplishments of these soldiers.<sup>75</sup>

Jinx Broussard authored *African American Foreign Correspondents: A History* detailing the various methods that the African American press utilized to cover overseas events throughout the twentieth century. Broussard describes African American war correspondents as a key component of the African American press's drive to bring

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<sup>73</sup> John D. Stevens, *From the Back of the Foxhole: Black Correspondents in World War II* (Minneapolis, MN: Journalism Monographs, 1973), 9.

<sup>74</sup> Stevens, *From the Back of the Foxhole*, 8.

<sup>75</sup> John D. Stevens, "Black Correspondents of World War II Cover the Supply Routes," *The Journal of Negro History* vol. 57, no. 4 (October 1972), 395.

international attention to America's race problems. The reporting of the exploits of African Americans in combat provided impetus to the African American community's fight for social justice on the homefront.<sup>76</sup> Broussard also points out how war correspondents' social activism also manifested itself in combat zones as they often used their status as quasi-officers to try to resolve grievances held by African American troops.<sup>77</sup> Broussard also provides more examples of the divisions within the African American press. In one instance, the National Negro Publishers Association (NNPA) won a concession from Roosevelt to publish a statement drawn up by the *Pittsburgh Courier* after a meeting to discuss how to gain greater traction within the mainstream press for stories of African American activities in support of the war effort. However, the head of the NNPA, John Sengstacke of the *Chicago Defender*, would not release the statement until he had a chance to edit it and other African American newspapers had a chance to review it.<sup>78</sup>

In addition, Broussard co-authored "Covering a Two-Front War: African American Foreign Correspondents during World War II" in the September 2005 issue of *American Journalism*. This article studied the work of African American war correspondents from the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* during World War II to determine how they framed the context of World War II. Broussard concludes that these

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<sup>76</sup> Jinx Broussard, *African-American Foreign Correspondents: A History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), Kindle edition, locations 2321-2334, 2625-2626.

<sup>77</sup> Broussard, *African-American Foreign Correspondents*, location 2515.

<sup>78</sup> Broussard, *African-American Foreign Correspondents*, locations 2612-2614.

correspondents utilized established journalistic techniques to report on both the accomplishments of African American soldiers and discrimination directed against these soldiers in order to emphasize the fight for equal rights ongoing on the home front.<sup>79</sup>

Career Baltimore journalist Antero Pietila and journalism professor Stacy Spaulding conducted a content analysis of the Baltimore *Afro-American's* war correspondents in *Race Goes to War*. Ollie Stewart, the first accredited war correspondent for an African American newspaper represented the *Afro-American*. His journalistic style focused on storytelling as opposed to reporting events, which suited the preferred yellow journalism approach of the *Afro-American's* publisher and editor.<sup>80</sup> Pietila and Spaulding assert that Stewart and the other six war correspondents of the *Afro-American* utilized a distinct journalistic style in which they engaged in personal reporting as a form of social action.<sup>81</sup>

Jinx Broussard and John Hamilton establish three types of reporting utilized by the war correspondents of African American newspapers. The first, chronicling the war, provides “factual chronicling of the day-to-day progress in the war.” The second category, human interest stories, serves to connect audiences at the home front with the events occurring overseas. The third category, eye-witness, allowed correspondents to demonstrate and corroborate that “African Americans were truly equal partners in the war

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<sup>79</sup> Jinx Coleman Broussard and John Maxwell Hamilton, “Covering a Two-Front War: Three African American Correspondents During World War II,” *American Journalism* vol. 22, no. 3 (Summer 2005), 33

<sup>80</sup> Antero Pietila and Stacy Spaulding, *Race Goes to War* (Chicago: Now and Then Reader, LLC, 2015), location 42, 53, 85, 156.

<sup>81</sup> Pietila and Spaulding, 238.



effort in every sense of the word. Black men and women fought, just as white men and women did.”<sup>82</sup> The typologies developed by Broussard and Hamilton for African American war correspondents and Kellner for war correspondents speak to the same roles that P. B. Young outlined in the Credo for the Negro Press. What Young describes as crusaders, Kellner defines as critical reporting and Broussard and Hamilton define as eye-witness reporting. Advocates served as propagandists in Kellner’s typology utilizing eye-witness accounts. Human interest stories were examples of objective reporting used to record and mirror the accomplishments of African Americans. Finally, heralds utilized objective reporting to chronicle the war from the African American perspective.

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<sup>82</sup> Broussard and Hamilton, 42-47.

## CHAPTER 1

### 1920-1940 - THE *PITTSBURGH COURIER* AND THE FIGHT AT HOME

An examination of the conditions under which African Americans lived during the twentieth century provides necessary context to understanding the advocacy journalism practiced by the African American press. During the interwar period, the experience of African Americans led the resolve of the African American community to harden in the pursuit of an end to discrimination. This resolve included recognizing that receiving equal opportunities in society required making equal contributions and sacrifices to sustain the nation. African American war correspondents became a key weapon for the African American press in the fight for equality.

The optimism that filled African Americans following the Civil War soon turned to disappointment as slavery in the South was replaced with a discriminatory societal structure that relegated them to second-class citizens. A large influx of African Americans to the North resulted in the rise of an informal system of discrimination that was no less confining than that practiced in the South. In the face of this disappointment, African American leaders pursued several strategies to gain racial equality. From 1890 to 1940, these leaders evolved into politically astute activists who used alliances, organizations, and increased voting power in their quest for increased opportunities for African Americans. As events across the world moved towards the involvement of the United States in World War II, these activists set their sights on gaining equal opportunity for African Americans to serve in the defense industry and in the Armed Forces.

The passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the US Constitution, respectively abolishing slavery, granting American citizenship to African Americans born in the United States and granting African Americans the right to vote were seminal advances in civil rights for African Americans.<sup>1</sup> However, in the decades following Reconstruction, the movement for African American civil rights lost ground, as much of white America did not consider African Americans as equals and were not willing to treat them as equals. State and local governments passed laws designed to impose strict social separation between African Americans and whites. These laws were collectively termed as Jim Crow laws.

Many factors led to the resurgence of white supremacy in the South. Some of these factors were the rise of poor white farmers who viewed emancipated African Americans as social and economic competitors; the Republican Party's decrease in support for civil rights legislation; and the desire for reconciliation of the sectional tensions between the North and South.<sup>2</sup> Jim Crow laws in the South established racial segregation in key areas such as public transportation, housing, schools, public facilities, as well as the disenfranchisement of African American voters. African Americans challenged the legality of Jim Crow laws, but in 1896 the Supreme Court validated the concept of separate but equal in its decision in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The

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<sup>1</sup> Krewasky A. Salter, *Combat Multipliers: African-American Soldiers in Four Wars* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10-16.

Supreme Court upheld the rulings of lower courts that laws mandating use of separate accommodations for whites and blacks were constitutional.

The rise of Jim Crow in the South led many African Americans to move north. In the Great Migration between 1910 and 1940, two million African Americans left the South to move north. Hundreds of thousands more African Americans that remained behind moved from rural farms to large southern urban centers. The percentage of African Americans living in urban areas more than doubled from twenty-two percent at the turn of the century to forty-eight percent by 1940.<sup>3</sup> The African American population in major northern cities increased exponentially; for example, the African American population in New York grew 91,000 to 327,000, in Chicago from 44,000 to 233,000 and in Detroit from 5,700 to 120,000.<sup>4</sup> While civil rights laws in Northern states prevented the enactment of Jim Crow laws, northern cities with large African American populations established ordinances and practices that resulted in segregated housing, schools and public facilities.<sup>5</sup>

Segregation not only created separation between whites and African Americans, it also created disparate conditions between white and African American communities. African Americans chafed under a system of laws and practices that cast them as second-

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<sup>3</sup> Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Klarman, 100.

<sup>5</sup> A. Russell Buchanan, *Black Americans in World War II* (Santa Barbara: Clio Books, 1977), 10-12.

class citizens. African Americans received less equitable treatment in areas such as the criminal justice system, housing, employment, education and voting rights.

In no area was the disparate conditions that African Americans lived under more apparent than within the criminal justice system. Lynching, the practice of mob-fueled extrajudicial killing of suspected criminals, originated in the frontier justice of the westward expansion, but found its place in the terror campaign waged by white supremacists in the South following Reconstruction. Between 1890 and 1930, an average of seventy African Americans were killed by lynching each year. Anti-lynching campaigns by private citizens, often led by women, as well as attempts by southern governors and other officials during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries led to a decrease in incidents of lynching. However, lynching increased following the end of World War I, as returning African American service members were reluctant to willingly assume their place as second-class citizens.<sup>6</sup> The lynching of former service members led to increased scrutiny across the nation and from the federal government, leading southern states to place increased emphasis on trying African American criminal suspects in court as quickly as possible in order to head off mob violence.<sup>7</sup>

Advocating for state and federal anti-lynching legislation became a key issue for the African American press in the early twentieth century. The *Pittsburgh Courier* sought to frame the fight to end lynching as a challenge to finding enough people with the moral

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<sup>6</sup> Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Viking, 2001), 23-24, 37-39, 102-103.

<sup>7</sup> Klarman, 118-122.

courage to stand against a lawless and barbaric practice. A May 1930 editorial discussing recent lynchings in South Carolina and Mississippi stated that “many white will deplore this flurry of mob murder, but few of them will have the courage to do anything about it. The South sorely needs a few white people who are brave enough to stand up for what is right.”<sup>8</sup> A *Courier* article printed in 1940 advocating for a federal anti-lynching law stated that “lynching must be made expensive to the counties indulging in it and dangerous to the murderers participating in it.”<sup>9</sup> This issue held such importance to the African American press that Robert Vann, owner and publisher of the *Courier*, cited Roosevelt’s inaction on federal anti-lynching legislation as one of the reasons that he broke from the Democratic Party after the 1936 presidential elections.<sup>10</sup> The *Courier* also highlighted instances in which people found the courage that it called for to stand up to lynch mobs. For example, articles printed by the *Courier* between 1930 and 1937 highlighted two occasions in which the governors of North Carolina and South Carolina averted lynchings by ordering state law enforcement officers to secure African Americans accused of crimes likely to incite a lynch mob. In another article, the *Courier* reported on a lynching stopped because two farmers located the intended target of the lynching and turned him over to law enforcement before the rest of the lynch mob could locate him.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 3, 1930, 24.

<sup>9</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 24, 1940, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Whitaker, *Smoketown* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 160-162.

<sup>11</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 21, 1935, 2; *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 24, 1930, 4; *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 15, 1937, 24.

The increased use of criminal trials still left African Americans in dire straits when accused of inflammatory crimes such as rape, assault or murder of a white person. In 1931, nine African-American youths were accused of raping two young white women in Alabama while all of them were traveling as drifters on a freight train. This group became nationally known as the Scottsboro Boys. Recognizing the inflammatory nature of the charges against this group of African Americans, the Alabama governor dispatched members of the National Guard to secure the jail and courthouse from the crowd of thousands that had gathered for the trials. Guilty verdicts and sentences of death were quickly passed by juries of all-white males despite forensic evidence that indicated that victims had fabricated their accusations. However, the intervention of both the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the International Labor Defense brought nation-wide attention to southern judicial proceedings.<sup>12</sup> This scrutiny revealed discriminatory practices that excluded women and African Americans from serving on juries, confessions obtained under duress, and denial of access to adequate defense counsel. These practices were not new but the Justice Department and the Supreme Court were reluctant to intervene in state criminal procedures. However, the Supreme Court overturned the Scottsboro Boys convictions on appeal in *Powell vs Alabama* in 1932 and *Norris vs Alabama* in 1936. These decisions extended the protection of due process outlined in the Bill of Rights to state criminal proceedings.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Fairclough, 133-139.

<sup>13</sup> Klarman, 117.

The African American press viewed the trials of the Scottsboro Boys as a potential watershed moment. Journalist Enoch P. Waters stated that Scottsboro was special because it represented the first major assault on the dual system of justice. P.B. Young of the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* framed the trials as a fight over whether African Americans could have competent legal counsel, unbiased juries, and fair trials in the South.<sup>14</sup> A May 1933 article in the *Courier* described this as a challenge to the “judicial system in many parts of Dixie states that resolves itself into a machinery for legal lynchings.”<sup>15</sup> The Scottsboro trials also revealed one of the fissures in the African American community, a split over the value of support for civil rights by the Communist Party. Most of the Scottsboro defendants chose to have the International Legal Defense (ILD) represent them during their appeals. The *Courier* was one of a small minority of African American newspapers that advocated for lawyers from the NAACP over the ILD. An editorial by George Schuyler in 1933 blamed the decision by the Scottsboro Boys to utilize ILD attorneys instead of the NAACP’s attorneys as motivated by Communist attempts to gain influence in the African American community.<sup>16</sup>

Voting rights was another area in which state laws and practices seemed to circumvent rights granted to African Americans by the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. States exploited the fact that the Fifteenth Amendment only prohibited the

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<sup>14</sup> Enoch P. Waters, *American Diary* (Chicago: Path Press, 1987), 282; Henry L. Suggs, *P.B. Young, Newspaperman: Race, Politics, and Journalism in the New South, 1910-1962* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 66.

<sup>15</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 25, 1933, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Buni, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), 236-237; George Schuyler, *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 6, 1933, 15.



use of racial discrimination to deny voting rights to a US citizen. States retained the right to determine voter qualifications and the states adopted a variety of restrictive voter qualification processes. These processes included poll taxes, literacy tests, and complicated voter registration processes.<sup>17</sup> The *Courier* published articles in the 1930s that emphasized the importance of African American votes and detailing the history of the use of the poll tax. Articles in 1931 and 1934 described the use of the poll tax in the South to disenfranchise African Americans. A 1938 article highlighted the fact that the states of New York and Illinois had as many voters as all seven Southern states that employed a poll tax.<sup>18</sup>

The most effective method of disenfranchising African American voters in the South came through placing racial restrictions on primary elections. With the consolidation of political power in the South with the Democratic Party, the primary elections became much more important than general elections. Southern states established rules that prohibited African Americans from voting in primary elections, rules that remained in place until the Supreme Court declared such restrictions unconstitutional in 1944.<sup>19</sup> In a 1930 front page article, the *Courier* reported on a decision by the Arkansas Supreme Court to uphold the legality of excluding African Americans

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<sup>17</sup> Klarman, 141-142.

<sup>18</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 12, 1931, 2; October 27, 1934, 16; October 1, 1938, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Buchanan, 12.

from primary voters. The article highlighted a mayoral race in which the margin of victory lay in the 348 registered African American voters.<sup>20</sup>

While Jim Crow laws in the South segregated African American and white communities, northern states accomplished this using local housing ordinances and real estate practices. During the early twentieth century, as the Great Migration brought large numbers of African Americans to northern cities, many of these cities passed ordinances that prohibited the sale of property in white neighborhoods to African Americans. The *Courier* categorized the intent to restrict the movement of African Americans as an attempt to confine them to areas “where they can be exploited by exorbitant rents, robbed by crooked merchants, bulldozed by brutal police, invaded by dens financed by the white underworld, and doomed to inordinate and untimely death by enforced residence in foul and congested rookeries.”<sup>21</sup> Even when the Supreme Court ruled such ordinances unconstitutional in 1917, cities continued to implement such ordinances.<sup>22</sup> The *Courier*’s reporting highlighted the national aspect of the fight to open neighborhoods to African Americans. One article reported the NAACP’s intent to investigate an Atlanta ordinance that empowered “the city clerk to deny moving permits to members of one race intending to move into a district inhabited by members of another race.”<sup>23</sup> Another article detailed a plan by the NAACP to legally challenge an Oklahoma City ordinance that barred African

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<sup>20</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 29, 1930, 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 24, 1940, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Klarman, 142-143.

<sup>23</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 17, 1932, 13.

Americans from occupying houses in white neighborhoods. The article linked this to successful legal challenges of similar ordinances in Louisville, New Orleans, and Richmond.<sup>24</sup>

Ordinances often were not necessary as white real estate agents often refused to sell to African Americans, banks refused to approve mortgage loans to African Americans and even government owned public housing projects were racially segregated. In those instances in which African Americans succeeded in purchasing property in a predominantly white neighborhood, they often were displaced through threats of violence or physical intimidation.<sup>25</sup> This violence and intimidation is not surprising since the Ku Klux Klan established strongholds in every northern city that had a significant African American population.<sup>26</sup> The most prevalent method of segregated housing in the North came through the establishment of restrictive housing covenants. These covenants were private community agreements to prevent the sale of property to African Americans. A 1937 *Courier* article lauded organized challenges to “residential covenants seeking to force Negroes to occupy restrictive housing areas” and cited legal challenges to restrictive covenants in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania.<sup>27</sup>

Restrictive covenants withstood the test of legal challenges as courts up to the Supreme Court ruled that such agreements were legal because African American

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<sup>24</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 21, 1933, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1993), 62-63.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty* (New York: Random House, 2008), 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 31, 1937, 3.

communities could also establish similar agreements to keep whites from purchasing property in their communities.<sup>28</sup> This further demonstrates that separate but equal continued to be the accepted law of the land. The *Courier* chastised a decision by the Colorado Supreme Court to uphold restrictive housing covenants as a “blow to democracy and freedom...the only difference between this legalized ghetto and the restrictions imposed on Jews in several European countries is that the American policy is hallowed by time.”<sup>29</sup>

Education may have been the facet of society that best reflected the complexity of segregation. Segregated school systems reflected how separate but equal often resulted in African American schools receiving drastically less resources than white schools. In eighteen southern states with segregated school systems, the average length of the school year was nineteen days shorter in African American schools and African American teachers received salaries that were about half of their white counterparts. In an illustration of how segregated schools created a disparity in educational outcomes, the percentage of African Americans rejected for military service due to illiteracy in 1941 greatly exceeded that of whites. In New York, the Selective Service rejection rate of African Americans was six times greater than that of whites. In Mississippi, the rejection rate of African Americans for illiteracy was eight times greater than that of whites.<sup>30</sup>

Many African American educators recognized that despite the disparity in resources, segregated school systems provided a desirable source of employment for

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<sup>28</sup> Buchanan, 11; Klarman, 144.

<sup>29</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 24, 1940, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Wynn, 75-76.

educated African Americans.<sup>31</sup> This and the fear of upsetting whites who controlled the funding that did exist for African American schools made African American school administrators hesitant to object to segregated school systems.<sup>32</sup> Even when African Americans presented a legal protest against the lack of opportunities for professional schooling in southern states, it became an affirmation of separate but equal and not a challenge against segregation. In 1938, in *Missouri ex rel Gaines v Canada*, the Supreme Court upheld that the state of Missouri's practice of providing funding for African Americans to attend law school out of the state rather than admit them to the University of Missouri School Of Law was unconstitutional. This left southern states with the options of either establishing separate professional schools for African Americans or integrating existing schools. Several states established African American professional schools while West Virginia chose to integrate its professional schools. Other states ignored the ruling and continued to offer to fund African American students to attend professional schools in other states.<sup>33</sup>

The Great Depression erased many of the employment opportunities that had drawn African Americans northward during the early 1900s. As the entire nation suffered, the promise of the New Deal often did not seem to extend to African Americans. Addressing employment discrimination, particularly in those fields regulated by the federal government, became a primary objective of many African American

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<sup>31</sup> Klarman, 147.

<sup>32</sup> Fairclough, 171.

<sup>33</sup> Klarman, 160-161.

leaders. These leaders felt that the increased workforce requirements brought on by the industrial buildup of World War II presented opportunities to end racial discrimination in the American workplace. The *Courier* lobbied for placement of African American leaders in Selective Service offices and other key agencies and the formation of Negro Defense committees in order to provide “an alert and organized public machinery ready to bring pressure to bear” towards removing barriers to African American employment.<sup>34</sup>

In the 1930s, African Americans were largely employed in low and semi-skilled jobs in agriculture, domestic service, and with the railroads. African Americans that moved to the North in the decades prior found themselves left out in the cold as the semi-skilled jobs in northern industries were drastically reduced or filled by whites. By 1937, the unemployment rate for African Americans in the North was almost 39 percent compared to 18 percent for whites. In the South, the large number of agriculture and domestic positions left unemployment rates almost even with 18 percent of African Americans unemployed compared to 16 percent of whites.<sup>35</sup> The New Deal offered little assistance for African Americans as the fields in which they were largely employed did not fall under programs such as unemployment insurance, Social Security, or aid to dependent children. In addition, many New Deal programs were either administered by local officials or adopted discriminatory standards. For instance, the National Recovery Administration often would set one minimum wage for African American workers and a different minimum wage level for whites or excluded fields that predominantly employed African Americans, such as domestic service, from minimum wage regulations. The

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<sup>34</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 3, 1940, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Sugrue, 45; Wynn, 39.

National Employment Service often acceded to requests from employers to limit positions to whites only and placed African Americans into unskilled positions without regard for their qualifications.<sup>36</sup>

As the United States began to increase industrial production to support the expansion of the US Armed Forces in the early 1940s, African Americans were largely left on the sideline. In 1940, the aircraft industry employed a few hundred African Americans. African Americans were also excluded from vocational training programs that sought to develop a workforce with the skills needed for large-scale increases in production. In 1940, less than 2 percent of the 115,000 people enrolled in vocational training under the Vocational Education National Defense program were African American. Instead, African Americans were placed in positions in manufacturing industries such as chemical production, shipbuilding, and iron and steel works. The dearth of African American workers in skilled positions was evidenced by African Americans making up less than 1 percent of the workers excluded from Selective Service in 1941 due to employment in defense industries.<sup>37</sup> *Courier* columnist George Schuyler opined that exclusion of African Americans from defense industry was evidence that national leaders did not feel that winning African American support for the war effort was necessary.<sup>38</sup>

Some African American leaders felt that the increasing needs for skilled workers in the defense industries made overturning discriminatory employment practices a

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<sup>36</sup> Sugrue, 51-52; Wynn, 40-41.

<sup>37</sup> Buchanan, 17; Buchanan, 29-30; Wynn 42.

<sup>38</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 28, 1940, 6.

necessary objective. The *Courier* reporting on a Chicago meeting of business leaders detailed comments by Lester Granger of the Urban League that highlighted recommendations by the National Defense Advisory Board to end discrimination in the defense industries because of the requirement for manpower. Granger characterized businesses that failed to fully utilize African American workers as ineffective and unpatriotic.<sup>39</sup> Roosevelt's issuance of Executive Order 8802, prohibiting employment discrimination in the defense industries and establishing the Committee for Fair Employment Practices (FEPC) provided those leaders with hope of achieving this objective. The comparison of Executive Order 8802 to the Emancipation Proclamation by some African Americans reflected the optimism that the African American community felt. However, while many employers were willing to concede increased wages and employment opportunities, demands for racially integrated workplaces caused white workers in northern and southern cities such as Philadelphia, Detroit, and Mobile to go on strike in protest. The FEPC had very few means to exert influence over these industries as it began with only twelve employees and a small budget. Its primary method of influence became exerting pressure by holding public hearings to review hiring practices of defense companies in major cities. While this proved to be effective in some cases, it was not the revolutionary change that African Americans hoped for.<sup>40</sup>

The relegation of African Americans to second-class citizen status in the aftermath of Reconstruction spurred civil rights activism in the late nineteenth century

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<sup>39</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 28, 1940, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Fairclough 186-188; Wynn 49-54.



and early twentieth centuries. Several competing strategies for how to achieve equal rights for African Americans would emerge between 1890 and 1940. In the early twentieth century, organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Urban League, and the Communist Party of America would emerge as organizing forces in the fight for racial equality. By 1940, African American activists would demonstrate their political acumen as they leveraged increased voting power of African Americans, strategic alliances, and mass action to bring significant pressure to bear in the fight for equality.

Several competing approaches to civil rights emerged among African Americans in the age of Jim Crow. In the last two decades of the 1800s, Booker T. Washington called for African Americans to gradually achieve racial equality by working with sympathetic whites, improving their education in technical skills required to obtain jobs, improving the economic basis of African Americans and avoiding open confrontation.<sup>41</sup> The *Pittsburgh Courier* did not become a nationally distributed newspaper until several years after Washington's death in 1915, however Robert L. Vann was clearly an advocate of Washington's philosophy. After a visit to the Tuskegee Institute in 1927, Vann wrote in a *Courier* editorial that "many of us theorize, froth at the mouth and talk. Dr. Washington demonstrated. We can appreciate now why Dr. Washington never took the time to reply to the mad froth of those who tried to use him as a means to 'climb into

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<sup>41</sup> Gary A. Donaldson, *The History of African Americans in the Military* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1991), 88-89.

notice.’ The man was busy with his demonstration. The froth is still froth, nothing more, while Tuskegee towers as a mountain to the capabilities of the black man.”<sup>42</sup>

By the early 1900s, African American activists in the North began to advocate for a new approach, one that demanded equal access to the same opportunities available to white Americans. The most prominent of these activists was W. E. B. DuBois. DuBois stressed the importance of realizing voting rights, gaining access to higher education, and all the rights of citizenship.<sup>43</sup> The NAACP reflected this approach to achieving civil rights, with its founders outlining a strategic approach based upon widely publicizing racial injustice, highlighting the achievements of African Americans, and challenging the legality of Jim Crow laws in the courts.<sup>44</sup> Civil rights activists viewed the outbreak of World War I as an opportunity to achieve significant gains and validate the effectiveness of their approach. With almost 400,000 African Americans conscripted into the Army, DuBois felt that faithful service to the nation during war would bring them much closer to equality after the war.<sup>45</sup>

However, in the aftermath of World War I, African Americans did not realize significant gains in their status in American society. In fact, returning African American soldiers became targets for violence, including lynching, as race violence struck in

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<sup>42</sup> Buni, 133.

<sup>43</sup> Fairclough, 75-76.

<sup>44</sup> Fairclough, 70-71.

<sup>45</sup> Fairclough, 91-93.

multiple cities in the summer of 1919.<sup>46</sup> This fueled the emergence of African Americans who espoused that African Americans stop seeking equality within mainstream America and instead create independent African American communities. Marcus Garvey and his United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was the most prominent group that called for African Americans to embrace remaining separate from white America, even advocating for African Americans to immigrate to Africa.<sup>47</sup> While the *Courier* published a weekly column written by Garvey in 1929 that described the history of the UNIA and his separatist philosophy, the *Courier's* owner and publisher gave no signs that he was an adherent to Garvey's ideas. In 1923, after Garvey's conviction on fraud charges, Robert Vann wrote that Garvey's problems were due to his unwillingness to listen to any other ideas besides his own.<sup>48</sup>

While African American separatism did not gain significant traction, the economic and social upheaval of the Great Depression resulted in increased influence by the Communist and Socialist parties of the United States. This influence led to some activists to espouse views of American race relations based on these ideological lenses. One of these activists was A. Philip Randolph, a Socialist who gained prominence for his ability to unionize African American railroad attendants when he founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Randolph explained that racial inequality in American was part of an economic and political system that exploited a divided

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<sup>46</sup> Chad Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 223-226.

<sup>47</sup> Sugrue, 15-16.

<sup>48</sup> Buni, 259-262.

American working class for profit. Randolph felt that mass action was required to change this system.<sup>49</sup> The *Courier* was one of the only African American newspapers that supported Randolph's attempts to unionize the railroad attendants. However, Robert Vann was not comfortable with Randolph's association with the Communist Party and eventually published editorials calling for Randolph to step aside as the leader of the labor effort due to negative effect that his Communist associations brought to negotiations.<sup>50</sup> During this same time period, other African American activists, led by Walter White, the Executive Secretary of the NAACP, espoused a strategy for achieving racial equality based upon persuading white America of the immorality of racial oppression. Changing the attitudes of mainstream America would result in changes in the institutional tools of racism.<sup>51</sup> The *Courier* generally supported and highlighted the activities of the NAACP and other activist organizations, however it was willing to challenge them as well. One instance of this came in 1926, when the *Courier* printed an article calling for an investigation into what it felt were questionable decisions for the use of funds raised for the defense of Ossian Sweet. Sweet was an African American doctor in Detroit who was charged with murder after killing a member of a mob that was attempting to prevent him from moving into a white Detroit neighborhood. The *Courier* also questioned funds that the NAACP provided to DuBois to study education in the

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<sup>49</sup> Sugrue, 84.

<sup>50</sup> Buni, 163-164.

<sup>51</sup> Sugrue, 80.

South. This debate became quite divisive in the African American community with the NAACP questioning Robert Vann's motives in the pages of its own journal, the *Crisis*.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, in the late 1930s, African American activists began to frame the African American struggle for racial equality as part of an international movement for freedom by people of color. The origins of this strategy came from the first meeting of the Pan-African Congress, organized in Paris by W. E. B. DuBois in 1919 to bring together delegates from Africa, the West Indies and the United States to advocate against Western colonialism in the aftermath of World War I.<sup>53</sup> Periodic meetings of the Pan-African Congress in the 1920s kept this idea of an overarching international struggle for freedom alive. China's fight against a 1931 invasion by Japan, Ethiopia's resistance to a 1935 invasion by Italy provided contemporary inspiration.<sup>54</sup>

While activists for racial equality found themselves divided by differing beliefs in how to best achieve it, several groups emerged in the early twentieth century as organizing forces. Nineteenth century organizations such as the Afro-American League and the National Afro-American Council were active but they failed to coalesce African Americans in the way that the NAACP, the Urban League and the Communist Party of America were able to in the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> A common factor in the success of these organizations was that they reflected the strategic alignment of African American leaders

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<sup>52</sup> Whitaker, 72-73.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, 181-183.

<sup>54</sup> Sugrue, 33-38.

<sup>55</sup> Shawn L. Alexander, *An Army of Lions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), xii-xv.

and the large number of white Americans who desired to combat racial inequality, particularly in the North.

The National Urban League traced its origins to the merge of the Committee for Improving Industrial Conditions of Negroes in New York, established in 1906, and the Committee on Urban Conditions Amongst Negroes, established in 1910. The Urban League reflected both the Progressive era focus of white philanthropists on addressing negative impacts of poor urban conditions and the extension of abolitionist traditions towards achieving racial equality for the large numbers of African Americans who had moved North during the Great Migration.<sup>56</sup> The Urban League established branches in forty-six cities and successfully brought the support of upper-class whites to bear upon programs to provide vocational training to African Americans, publicize poor living conditions in African American neighborhoods, and train African American social workers. The Urban League also played a key role in shifting the relationship of white supporters from benefactors to partners with African American leaders.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, the NAACP was founded in 1909, by a group of white philanthropists and influential, upper-class African Americans. Two of the most prominent founders were Oswald Villard, a white man descended from a family of newspaper publishers, railroad magnates, and abolitionists and W. E. B. DuBois. Villard provided capital to the

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<sup>56</sup> Fairclough, 68; Mission and History, National Urban League (<http://nul.iamempowered.com/who-we-are/mission-and-history>) accessed September 23, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Buchanan, 4; Mission and History, National Urban League (<http://nul.iamempowered.com/who-we-are/mission-and-history>) accessed September 23, 2017.

fledgling organization while the cachet of DuBois attracted support from the African American community. Unlike the Urban League, the NAACP defined its purpose from the outset as overturning racial oppression in America. The NAACP sought to increase public awareness of racial inequality, influence members of Congress on legislative issues such as lynching and poll taxes, challenge the legality of discriminatory statutes in the courts, and engage the Presidential administration.<sup>58</sup>

During its first decade, DuBois' passionate rhetoric helped increase the circulation of the NAACP's monthly magazine the *Crisis* from 1,000 copies per month to 100,000 copies. Villard's guidance of the litigation strategy resulted in key court decisions such as the successful challenge of the application of literacy tests for voters in Oklahoma, discriminatory housing ordinances in Kentucky and discriminatory business practices in New York. The NAACP also gained significant publicity from unsuccessful engagements with the Wilson administration to stop the nation-wide release of the controversial film *The Birth of a Nation* and with Congress to gain passage of legislation designating lynching as a federal crime. By 1916, the NAACP had almost 9,000 members in seventy-one branches, including three branches in the South.<sup>59</sup> This demonstrated the ability of the NAACP to become a national level organization while the Urban League remained primarily a regional organization. The NAACP's growth into the premier civil rights organization of the early twentieth century was definitively established in the mid-1930s when W. E. B. DuBois broke from the organization. DuBois had increasingly

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<sup>58</sup> Buchanan, 5-7.

<sup>59</sup> Fairclough, 79-84.

begun to advocate for African Americans to establish economic independence, a form of separatism that conflicted with the NAACP's bedrock philosophy that African Americans were entitled to equal access to the American economic system. In 1936, DuBois resigned as the editor of the *Crisis* and negotiated an agreement to publish a weekly column in the *Courier*.<sup>60</sup>

Arguably, the Communist and Socialist parties had the most success in organizing African American opposition to racial discrimination. In the 1920s and 1930s, these organizations married their existing structure used to organize the American working class to explicit rejections of racism to gain significant inroads with African Americans. This proved effective in attracting African Americans disillusioned by both the Democratic and Republican parties. The Soviet Union's alliance with Nazi Germany ended this.

In the 1920s, the Socialist Party of America began to frame the oppression of African Americans as just another facet of the widespread exploitation of the American working class and sought to forge connections with civil rights organizations.<sup>61</sup> This view attracted followers such as A. Philip Randolph, who viewed organizing the African American working class as critical to achieving racial equality.<sup>62</sup> The Communist Party of America also denounced racism and classified African Americans in the South as an oppressed population that deserved self-determination. While many African American

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<sup>60</sup> Buni, 259-262.

<sup>61</sup> Sugrue, 41-42.

<sup>62</sup> Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 14.



activists considered such a proposal as meaningful rhetoric, it provided a powerful statement of where the Communist Party stood in relation to racism.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to fiery rhetoric, the Communist Party took concrete steps to attract African Americans. The Communist-controlled International Labor Defense (ILD) assumed the responsibility for litigating the appeals for the Scottsboro Boys in Alabama. The ILD instituted an aggressive nation-wide campaign to bring attention to this case outside of the South, in contrast with the NAACP who offered assistance in the defense but had initially sought to minimize its connection due to concerns that the low socio-economic class represented by the defendants was inconsistent with the upper and middle-class personnel that it drew its support from. The Congress of Industrial Organizations sought to unionize African Americans working in mills, mines, factories and railways. Communist Party organizers traveled into the South in attempts to organize African American farmers. By 1939, the Communist Party membership included more than 7,000 African Americans. However, the Communist Party's refusal to denounce fascism due to the Soviet Union's entering into the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany placed the Communist Party of America at odds with the growing number of African Americans who identified fascism with racial oppression.<sup>64</sup>

In the early 1940s, African American activists proved their political acumen as they were able to effectively wield the increased voting power of African Americans, leverage strategic alliances, and the threat of mass action to realize gains in their fight for racial equality. As war spread across Europe and America increasingly postured for war

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<sup>63</sup> Fairclough 142-143.

<sup>64</sup> Fairclough 136-145.

by focusing industry production on military equipment and materiel and undertaking a massive expansion of the Armed Forces, African American activists identified opportunities for progress. Two of these opportunities lay in overcoming discriminatory barriers in defense industries and the Armed Forces.

One of the effects of the Great Migration was that hundreds of thousands of African Americans moved away from the systematic disenfranchisement in place in southern states. Politicians from both the Democratic and Republican parties began to court this increasing population of newly empowered voters. This increased voting power resulted in actions such as a Missouri representative introducing anti-lynching legislation in 1922 and the election of the first African American from a northern state to the US House of Representatives in 1929. Since Reconstruction, the racial policies of the Southern Democratic bloc had pushed African Americans to consistently vote in favor of Republicans. Northern Democrats began to make inroads in the 1920s and New Deal programs during the Depression proved pivotal in drawing African American votes to the Democratic ticket during the 1936 presidential election.<sup>65</sup>

The presidential election of 1940 proved that African American activists understood how to wield the power of their voting bloc. The Republican candidate, Wendell Willkie, attempted to reclaim the Republican Party's role as the Party of Lincoln, publicly declaring himself as an enemy of racism and gaining the endorsement of two influential African American newspapers, the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Baltimore Afro-American*. Robert Vann and the *Courier* had led the movement of African

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<sup>65</sup> Klarman, 100-101.

American voters away from the Republican Party during the 1932 presidential elections. However, disillusionment with Roosevelt led the *Courier* to publish articles extolling Willkie's commitment to racial equality. One article printed just days before the election listed ten reasons to vote for Willkie. These reasons focused primarily on Roosevelt's reliance on Southern Democrats and the New Deal's failure to significantly improve conditions for African Americans.<sup>66</sup> The *Courier's* writers described Willkie as the "second Lincoln emancipating the present Negro from the chains of economic slavery" and also compared Willkie's campaign promised to the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>67</sup>

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt had often allied with sympathetic administrators of various New Deal programs to champion access for African Americans.<sup>68</sup> In September 1940, she arranged a meeting between the president and three prominent activists, Walter White of the NAACP, A. Phillip Randolph who had just left the National Negro Congress, and T. Arnold Hill of the Urban League. These African American leaders requested that the president demonstrate his commitment to preventing discrimination in the execution of Selective Service, authorize the admission of African Americans into the Army Air Corps, the Nursing Corps and the Red Cross, and provide additional opportunities for African Americans in the Navy. With the 1940 presidential election less than two months away, Roosevelt did not want to risk alienating African American voters. In October 1940, the president announced a revised racial policy in the military.

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<sup>66</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 2, 1940, 12.

<sup>67</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 27, 1940 1; November 2, 1940, 18.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 137-138.

The elements of this policy included: increasing the number of African Americans admitted to the Armed Forces until they numbered ten percent of the total force, equal to their proportion in the American population; admission of eligible African Americans to serve in the Army Air Corps and as officers; and promotion of Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. to the rank of Brigadier General, the first black general officer in the history of the United States Armed Forces.<sup>69</sup>

A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement (MOWM) and its role in influencing Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802 demonstrate African American activists' skills at utilizing mass action to generate political pressure. After the election of 1940, activists attempted to use their contacts within the Roosevelt administration to remove barriers to opportunities for meaningful employment in the defense industry for African Americans. Discussion with the Office of Production Management and federal jobs officials resulted in no progress. From his role in the National Negro Congress to his leadership in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Randolph had proven himself to be eminently skilled in mobilizing African Americans for mass action. In January 1941, Randolph wrote editorials calling for African Americans to demand the end to discrimination in the defense industry and to demonstrate their resolve with a mass march on Washington DC. Randolph created a March on Washington Movement Committee and leaders of the Urban League and the NAACP soon joined the committee as their overtures to the Roosevelt administration were rebuffed. Randolph demonstrated his skill at generating grass-roots support over the next few months as estimates of the number of

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<sup>69</sup> Donaldson, 105.

African Americans that would participate in the march reached 50,000 in May and 100,000 in June. Randolph also excluded white American supporters from the march, challenging African American self-reliance.<sup>70</sup>

Members of the Roosevelt administration called upon Randolph several times to call off the march, citing ongoing national tensions over the debate of the war itself as well as potential harm to the fight against racial discrimination. Even Eleanor Roosevelt asked Randolph to cancel the march, citing her concerns that it would cause southern Democrats to increase their opposition to any measure to relieve racial discrimination. After he refused, Mrs. Roosevelt arranged a meeting with Roosevelt, the Secretaries of War and Navy and the director of the Office of Production Management. When Roosevelt expressed his opposition to the March on Washington, Randolph stated that the march would not be necessary if the president issued an executive order addressing discrimination in the defense industry. While Roosevelt stated that he required more time to study the question of discrimination in defense industry, the July 1 scheduled date for the march forced him to take action. Rather than risk this, on June 25, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802.<sup>71</sup> This order “reaffirm[ed] the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color or national origin.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War*, 42-45.

<sup>71</sup> Buchanan, 22-25.

<sup>72</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Executive Order 8802,” U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission, <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/35th/thelaw/eo-8802.html> (accessed on 17 July 2010).

At the end of 1939, the United States began expanding the Armed Forces as World War II unfolded in Europe.<sup>73</sup> Since the end of the Civil War, the Army had restricted the peacetime service of African Americans to four African-American regiments mandated by law. During the Spanish-American War and World War I, the Army established new African American units as required to accommodate additional African American manpower accessed for those conflicts.<sup>74</sup> The Army would continue this practice during World War II. In August 1939, there were less than five thousand African American enlisted soldiers and only five African American officers in the Regular Army.<sup>75</sup> These soldiers manned four African American combat regiments, the 9th and 10th Cavalry and 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments, and two African American support units, the 47th and 48th Quartermaster Regiments. The rapid expansion of the Army required a large-scale increase in the accession of African Americans into the Army, reaching a peak strength of more than 700,000 in September 1944.<sup>76</sup> This resulted in the creation of a great number of African American units rather than placing African American soldiers into units with white soldiers. This growth occurred overwhelmingly in the support and service units. In the European Theater of Operations, only twenty-two

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<sup>73</sup> Frank N. Schubert, *Mobilization* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1995), 9, <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/mobilization/mobpam.htm> (accessed 10 June 2010).

<sup>74</sup> Bryan D. Booker, *African Americans in the United States Army in World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 6.

<sup>75</sup> Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 44.

<sup>76</sup> Ulysees Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1966), 416.

of 1,500 African American company-sized units were combat units.<sup>77</sup> As early as 1938, Robert Vann lobbied Congressman Hamilton Fish to sponsor legislation to re-establish an African American combat division. He had previously dispatched *Courier* journalist Edgar Rouzeau to examine the conditions of the four African American combat regiments and published articles with Rouzeau's findings that these African American infantrymen and cavalrymen were engaged solely in menial tasks such as cleaning stables and serving as orderlies.<sup>78</sup>

While the widespread utilization of segregation in the Army dated back to the Civil War, the genesis for the Army's race policy in 1940 lay in the conclusions reached during the interwar period.<sup>79</sup> During World War I, the American Expeditionary Force included two African American combat divisions, the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions.<sup>80</sup> Following the conclusion of World War I, the Army devoted significant effort to the development of lessons learned from the employment and performance of African American soldiers. The Army derived these lessons from two sources: the assessments of those senior officers that led African American soldiers during World War I and studies conducted by senior officers attending the Army War College.

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<sup>77</sup> Elliot V. Converse III et al., *The Exclusion of African American Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II: The Study Commissioned by the U.S. Army to Investigate Racial Bias in the Awarding of the Nation's Highest Military Decoration* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997), 69.

<sup>78</sup> Buni, 299-306.

<sup>79</sup> L. D. Reddick, "The Negro Policy of the United States Army 1775-1945," *Journal of Negro History* 34, no.1 (January 1949): 17.

<sup>80</sup> Salter, 57-58.

Many of the senior officers that commanded African American soldiers during World War I provided harsh assessments of their willingness and ability to serve in combat. In March 1920, Major General Charles Clarendon Ballou, Commanding General of the 92nd Infantry Division, submitted a report to the War Department in which he states that “the average negro is a rank coward in the dark and I subsequently realized to the full how worthless this trait renders him in the service of Security and Information.”<sup>81</sup> Lieutenant General Robert L. Bullard, Commanding General of the Second US Army, the 92nd Infantry Division’s higher headquarters during World War I, characterized African American soldiers as “cowards and rapists, hopelessly inferior as fighting men.”<sup>82</sup> The 93rd Infantry Division had earned accolades for its performance in combat while serving with French forces, including three of its four African American regiments receiving the Croix de Guerre from the French government.<sup>83</sup> However, the regimental commanders from the 93<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division provided similar feedback, stating that the use of African Americans should be limited to labor rather than combat and African American soldiers must be led by white officers and non-commissioned officers in order to serve effectively.<sup>84</sup>

There were indications that contradicted the assessments of these commanders. During World War I, the media continually highlighted the performance and bravery of

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<sup>81</sup> Reddick, 24.

<sup>82</sup> Reddick, 24.

<sup>83</sup> Lee, 5-8.

<sup>84</sup> Lee, 17.



black units. This extended to national media including the United Press and the *New York Times*, not just the black press. Immediately after the end of World War I, civil rights activists collected testimonials about the conduct and bravery of black soldiers from American and French officers as well as mayors of several towns in France.

The negative assessment of black soldiers was not expressed by all military commanders. General John Pershing, commanding general of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I, provided positive assessments of the training, courage, motivation and spirit of African American soldiers in a cable sent to General Peyton March, Chief of Staff of the Army, in 1918.<sup>85</sup> Colonel Vernon A. Caldwell, a regimental commander in the 92nd Infantry Division during World War I, advocated integration of African American soldiers in a document submitted to the Assistant Commandant of the Army War College in 1920. He believed that African American units performed best when incorporated at the company level into white regiments.<sup>86</sup> Caldwell cited the negative effects of segregation on the morale of African American soldiers and teamwork between African American and white units as the primary justification for integration.<sup>87</sup> Colonel Franklin Dennison, a regimental commander in the 93rd Infantry

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<sup>85</sup> Cable from General John Pershing to General Peyton March, 19 June 1918 in *War Letters*, ed. Andrew Carroll (New York: Scribner, 2001), 140.

<sup>86</sup> Johnnie J. Atkins, "The Army as a Profession of Choice for African American Americans in World War II: Assessing the Impact on Future Force Structure" (Strategy Research Project, US Army War College, 2001), 2. <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ada391128> (accessed 14 November 2010).

<sup>87</sup> Memorandum from V.A. Caldwell to Assistant Commandant, General Staff College, 14 March 1920 in *Segregation Entrenched*, vol. 4 of *African Americans in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents*, ed. Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard Nalty (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1977), 342.

Division during World War I, wrote that he thought African American soldiers were disciplined, obedient, and withstood hardship with little complaint. He identified a high illiteracy rate as the biggest problem of leading an African American unit, citing the difficulty illiteracy caused in generating African American non-commissioned officers.<sup>88</sup>

During the interwar period the Army War College conducted research projects on behalf of the General Staff.<sup>89</sup> In this role, the War College devoted efforts to studying and formulating recommendations on how best to utilize African American soldiers in the Army. In 1924, the War College conducted a survey soliciting opinions on the proper utilization of African American soldiers from its faculty and student body. Of the eighty-four officers that responded, seventy-six favored the use of African Americans in combat units, while only eight respondents advocated restriction of African Americans to service units. Two officers advocated complete racial integration of combat units.<sup>90</sup> One of these officers, Colonel James Parsons, justified his stance by stating that if segregated units were maintained then “racial antagonism will develop between white and Negro units.”<sup>91</sup> Parsons felt that integration would prevent this conflict because “even in the south white

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<sup>88</sup> Lee, 19.

<sup>89</sup> Elliot V. Converse III et al., *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II: The Study Commissioned by the U.S. Army to Investigate Racial Bias in the Awarding of the Nation's Highest Military Decoration* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997), 25.

<sup>90</sup> Memorandum for the Commandant, The Army War College, 30 August 1924 in *Segregation Entrenched*, vol. 4 of *African Americans in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents*, 353.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 353

men work alongside of the Negro without objecting, and it is reasonable to suppose that if he will do this, he will not object to serving alongside of him in time of war.”<sup>92</sup>

A 1925 report titled “The Use of Negro Manpower in War” reflected the prevailing opinions of Army leadership about African American soldiers:

- “1. Facts
  - a. Blacks are naturally subservient to whites and believe themselves to be inferior to white.
  - b. Blacks lack the initiative, resourcefulness and self-control in the face of danger that whites possess.
  - c. Blacks are mentally inferior to whites.
  - d. In past wars, blacks have performed well as laborers but are inferior to whites as technicians or combat soldiers.
  - e. Political pressure forced the Army to form the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions and commission 600 black officers during World War I.<sup>93</sup>
2. Opinions of the War College
  - a. Newly created black units should not exceed battalion size
  - b. Blacks soldiers should not be assigned to white units as individuals
  - c. Black officers in World War I failed as combat officers.
  - d. Political or racial pressure should not be allowed to force the Army to alter its policy on utilization of black Soldiers.”<sup>94</sup>

In 1936, another War College report concluded that African American soldiers were easily susceptible to bad leadership.<sup>95</sup> A 1940 War College survey showed that the majority of officers in attendance that year felt that “Negros could only associate socially

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 354.

<sup>93</sup> “The Use of Negro Manpower in War,” 1925, Army War College Curricular Archives, Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA, <http://ahecwebdds.carlisle.army.mil/awweb/main.jsp?flag=browse&msd=1&awdid=91> (accessed 14 November 2010), 5-6.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>95</sup> Mershon and Schlossman, 15.

with the lowest class of whites. This social inequality between blacks and whites made any close association of black and white soldiers detrimental to harmony and efficiency.”<sup>96</sup>

The opposing views of the Roosevelt administration and African American leaders on the role of African Americans in the Army are best illustrated by the positions staked out by the Army and the African American press. In a letter to Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Chief of Staff of the Army George C. Marshall defended the use of segregation by stating that the War Department could not ignore the social relationship between African Americans and whites. He stated that the Army required the freedom to employ personnel in accordance with their capabilities and warned that social experimentation by the Army would endanger efficiency, discipline and morale.<sup>97</sup> The view of the African American community is best captured by the work of the *Pittsburgh Courier* which funded the establishment the Committee for the Participation of Negroes in National Defense in 1939. Part of the Committee’s platform viewed the Armed Forces policies on the use of African Americans as a challenge to their right to citizenship by denying them the right to participate in the war effort.<sup>98</sup> After spending more than seventy years living under the systematic oppression of racial segregation, World War II provided the opportunity for a civil rights movement that had been developing for decades to fully emerge. The African American press was at the forefront of this movement, and it viewed military service as key battleground in the fight for equal rights.

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<sup>96</sup> Converse III, et al, 26.

<sup>97</sup> Donaldson, 112.

<sup>98</sup> Wynn, 22.



## CHAPTER 2

### 1940-1945: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PRESS AND THE US GOVERNMENT

As the United States entered World War II in December 1941, one of the areas that the US government began to focus on was the perceived alienation of the African American community. The Roosevelt administration considered this divide as a significant vulnerability to the war effort. The African American press decided to utilize its influence with the African American community to both increase support for the war effort and continue the fight for equal rights. Various government agencies sought to control, suppress, and influence the African American press to address specific concerns.

The racial tensions of the inter-war period took on increased significance following US entry into World War II. The Roosevelt administration was concerned that deteriorating race relations presented a threat to its efforts to maximize domestic support to the war effort. Some members of the administration felt that much of the racial tensions come from unrealistic expectations espoused by African American leaders solely to maintain their influence within the African American community. Other officials worried that racial tensions presented a topic that Axis propaganda could exploit both in the United States and internationally.

By 1941, African Americans comprised ten percent of the American population. In the first draft calls following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Selective Service Administration had to turn away more than 30,000 African Americans as the number of African Americans reporting for service greatly outnumbered the number of African

Americans that the services were willing to accept.<sup>1</sup> Support for the war against the Axis amongst African Americans waned quickly as evidence mounted that African Americans felt this was not a war that would benefit them. In May 1942, the Office of Facts and Figures commissioned a study to assess African American morale. The results of this survey showed that discrimination within defense industries and in the military had negatively impacted African American support for the war. “Interviewers concluded that ‘Negro bitterness toward Army segregation and Navy exclusion was deep seated, sprang from feelings accumulated through the years and merely brought into sharp relief by the draft and the war.’”<sup>2</sup> These results were mirrored in anecdotal encounters. African American journalist Enoch P. Waters of the *Chicago Defender* related “meeting with a group of irate young men who looked incensed at having to be called upon to fight for a country that had sought to emasculate them. Some of the more militant volunteered to be photographed taking an oath of resistance to the draft.”<sup>3</sup> The survey revealed the extent to which African Americans felt disconnected from the aims of the war. Only 11 percent of the respondents believed that conditions for African Americans would improve with a US victory.<sup>4</sup> More than half of the respondents felt that African Americans would be treated the same or better if ruled by Japan. Twenty percent of the respondents even felt that they

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press during World War II* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc, 1975), 93, 105.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara D. Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race 1938-1948* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 113.

<sup>3</sup> Enoch P. Waters, *American Diary* (Chicago: Path Press, 1984), 366.

<sup>4</sup> Finkle, 102-103.

would be treated the same if governed by Germany, despite Adolph Hitler's clearly espoused views of the racial inferiority of people of color.<sup>5</sup>

The apparent sympathy that some African Americans felt for the Axis did nothing to allay the concerns of the US government that race-related tensions could provide material for Axis propaganda efforts. In 1942, the OWI assessed six months of propaganda broadcasts from Germany, Italy and Japan. This assessment found that American racial tensions were an infrequent topic of these broadcasts, appearing in only twenty-one broadcasts.<sup>6</sup> OWI concluded that when Axis propaganda focused on race, it sought to achieve several effects. Domestically, Axis propaganda focused on fostering discontent among African Americans, sowing doubt among mainstream America on the morality of the war and fomenting fear of African Americans. Internationally, Axis propaganda efforts targeted nations in Asia, Central and South America with significant populations of people of color.<sup>7</sup>

Some officials in the Office of War Information (OWI) expressed a more cynical view of why African American support for the war effort was declining. An OWI report on the morale of African Americans written in late 1942 assessed that there was no expectation among African American leaders of achieving their demands for an end to segregation in the Army and full political franchise for African Americans in the South.

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<sup>5</sup> Savage, 114.

<sup>6</sup> "Axis Propaganda on the Status of the Negro in American Society," 9 May 1942, Box 54, Phileo Nash Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives, Independence, Missouri, 1.

<sup>7</sup> "Axis Propaganda on the Status of the Negro in American Society," 2.



The report based this on private conversations with African American leaders who the author claimed stated that the demands were necessary to enable those leaders to maintain their influence and in some cases, their jobs and positions. The OWI included the African American press in this characterization, stating that the purpose of African American newspapers is not to report news but to protest social inequality.<sup>8</sup>

As the nation entered World War II, the African American press faced a decision on how to proceed in its advocacy for equal rights for African Americans. During World War I, the African American community had decided that its advocacy for an end to racial discrimination would come at the expense of the war effort. Many journalists and leaders, including some African Americans, felt that advocacy for significant domestic change conflicted with supporting the war effort.<sup>9</sup> Within six weeks of the United States' entry into World War II, the African American press made its decision, choosing to continue its advocacy for an end to discrimination at home while advocating for the African American community to support the war against the Axis. The *Pittsburgh Courier* published an editorial on 13 January 1942 advocating for war against Japan and racial prejudice. Other African American newspapers quickly followed suit, presenting a united front.

In February 1942, the *Pittsburgh Courier* launched what it termed its Double V campaign, adopting the term from a letter published in the paper several weeks earlier

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<sup>8</sup> "Report on Negro Morale," 1942, Box 20, Phileo Nash Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives, Independence, Missouri, 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Earnest J. Perry, "A Common Purpose: The Negro Newspaper Publishers Association's Fight for Equality during World War II," *American Journalism* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 34-35.

that called on the African American community to strive for victory over its enemies overseas and victory over its enemies at home.<sup>10</sup> In March 1942, the *Chicago Defender* adopted the slogan “Remember Pearl Harbor and Sikeston Too: Fight to Save Democracy” and in July 1942, the *Baltimore Afro-American* published an editorial to explain the symbolism of the closed fist that it had been printing on its front page. This fist represented the willingness of the African American community to unite in the fight against the Axis abroad and against segregation at home.<sup>11</sup>

Over the next eighteen months, the Double V campaign underwent significant evolution. The Double V campaign consisted of almost one thousand articles, editorials, photographs, letters, and drawings published in the *Courier*. Initially some of the editorials published took on strong and polarizing statements, such as “‘THOSE WHO DO NOT WANT COLORED PEOPLE TO FULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE WAR EFFORT SHOULD BE CLASSED AS TRAITORS TO THE CAUSE OF DEMOCRACY’” and “encouraged blacks to ‘shame’ verbally any whites guilty of prejudice, pointing out that someone had to be either totally for democracy or against it.” Perhaps most alarming of all was an editorial that stated “‘if we are to have no democracy at home, it does not make a great deal of difference what happens abroad.’”<sup>12</sup> In his July 1918 editorial, W. E. B. Dubois had called for African Americans to, “while this war

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick S. Washburn, “The *Pittsburgh Courier*’s Double V Campaign in 1942,” *American Journalism* 3, no. 2 (1986), 73.

<sup>11</sup> Perry, 33-34. Sikeston, Missouri was the site of a 1942 lynching of Cleo Wright, during which the victim was burned alive.

<sup>12</sup> Washburn, “The *Pittsburgh Courier*’s Double V Campaign in 1942,” 77.

lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens.”<sup>13</sup> Determination not to repeat the stance that the African American press adopted during World War I may have contributed to the Double V campaign opening with such strong stances.

The African American press began to modulate the tone of its advocacy within a few months. In August 1942, the *Courier* published an editorial calling for African Americans to sacrifice property and even their lives in support of victory overseas while defending the necessity of continuing to demand the equal rights.<sup>14</sup> In 1943, the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association set the theme for its annual meeting as highlighting the “function of a minority press in a nation at war” but published editorials in its member newspapers that pointed out the African American press was firmly behind the war but would fight for African American equality at the same time.<sup>15</sup> The campaign became much more pragmatic as the African American press sought ways to focus on “unifying its aims and concentrate on a practical strategy for a sustained frontal attack on the issues, institutions, and personalities which are blocking the progress of the race.”<sup>16</sup> One opportunity that the African American press identified in which to gain additional resources was in working with the government. African American publishers accepted an invitation from the OWI to form the Advisory Committee on the Negro Press, which they

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<sup>13</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, “Editorial,” *The Crisis* 16, no. 3 (July 1918), 111.

<sup>14</sup> Washburn, “The *Pittsburgh Courier*’s Double V Campaign in 1942,” 77.

<sup>15</sup> Perry, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence D. Hogan, *A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett* (Haworth: St Johann Press, 2002), 227.

saw as an opportunity to form a mutually advantageous relationship in which to gain material that many of the small African American newspapers could not get with their limited resources.<sup>17</sup>

By late 1943, the *Courier* had largely discontinued the use of the Double V campaign as a slogan. Over the past months it had become much less prominent, appearing on the front page in less than twenty-five percent of issues. Other African American papers had also discontinued the use of similar slogans and imagery that highlight the dual campaigns that the African American community was fighting.<sup>18</sup> Frank Bolden, a *Courier* reporter, explained that the African American press considered gains made in decreasing discrimination as good faith efforts by the government and industrial leaders and modified a successful campaign.<sup>19</sup> The fact that multiple government agencies as well as the military services had established formal structures to move their relationships with the African American press from adversarial to cooperative may have supported such assessments.

Every government agency had to address the African American community in the execution of policies and programs. Several of those agencies sought specifically to address the issue of African American morale and three agencies in particular impacted the African American press. The objectives and methods of each of these agencies differed based on their views of the African American press. The Office of Censorship

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<sup>17</sup> “OWI Advisory Committee on the Negro Press,” Fall 1943, Phileo Nash Papers, Box 20, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives, Independence, MO, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Washburn, “The *Pittsburgh Courier*’s Double V Campaign in 1942,” 74, 80.

<sup>19</sup> Washburn, “The *Pittsburgh Courier*’s Double V Campaign in 1942,” 82.

sought to exert control over the African American press as part of its overall mandate. The Office of War Information attempted to build influence with the African American press as a means of influencing the African American community. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) viewed the African American press as a threat and engaged in a campaign intended to suppress that threat.

Over the course of his first two terms, the relationship between Roosevelt and the press had become somewhat adversarial. During his 1940 election campaign, though Roosevelt won fifty-five percent of the popular vote, only one quarter of daily newspapers and one-third of weekly newspapers had endorsed his candidacy. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Roosevelt administration placed the FBI in charge of the government's media relations program and assigned it the task of ensuring that the press did not reveal any military secrets. At a press conference on 9 December, Roosevelt told the press that his two requirements were that news must be accurate and did not provide any assistance to the enemy. However, information functions in his administration were dispersed across multiple agencies with the Office of Facts and Figures, the Office of Government Reports, the Office of Emergency Management, and the Office of the Coordinator of Information all having significant roles with no clear guiding vision beyond the president's.<sup>20</sup> The FBI recommended the creation of a separate agency to execute censorship. On 18 December, Congress passed the First War Powers Act, giving the president authority to "censor international mail, cable, radio, and other means of cross-border communication." The following day, Roosevelt issued Executive Order

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<sup>20</sup> Betty H. Winfield, *FDR and the News Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 127-128, 155.

1918 establishing the Office of Censorship and appointed Byron Price, a veteran journalist from the Associated Press, as its director.<sup>21</sup>

As a journalist, Price viewed censorship as a difficult and risky undertaking in a democratic society. He defined two tasks for censorship: depriving the enemy of information and collecting intelligence that can be used against the enemy. Price also cautioned that a democracy could not utilize censorship in order to suppress criticism of the government or to conceal government errors.<sup>22</sup> During World War I, censorship was executed by journalist George Creel and the Committee on Public Information, which acted as censors, publicists, and propagandists using heavy-handed methods. Almost certainly influenced by this negative legacy, Price chose to establish a system that relied on the American press to voluntarily censor itself.<sup>23</sup>

For the Office of Censorship, three guiding principles of voluntary censorship were censoring only those topics that raised a question of military security, avoiding any interference with expression of editorial opinion, and preventing policy or public issues unrelated to security from becoming a factor in censorship decisions.<sup>24</sup> After its creation, the Office of Censorship established a censorship board with representation from the War Department, Department of the Navy, Department of the Treasury, the Attorney General

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<sup>21</sup> Michael S. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 31-33, 36.

<sup>22</sup> US Government, *A Report on the Office of Censorship* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1945), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 15-16, 2.

<sup>24</sup> US Government, *Report of the Office of Censorship*, 12.

and the Postmaster General. This board helped develop the foundational document for America's system of censorship during World War II, *The Code of Wartime Practices*.<sup>25</sup> In twelve pages, this document defined what newspaper and radio journalists could report. Topics identified for censorship included troop, ship, and aircraft strength, movements, and composition; fortifications, locations of critical assets such as coastal defense forces, anti-aircraft guns, and bomb shelters; war production and war industry contracts, and weather outside of the local area (defined as a four state radius).<sup>26</sup>

The Office of Censorship sought to use the framework of voluntary censorship to control all of the domestic press, including the African American press. In a meeting in early 1942, representatives of the African American press told Byron Price that the African American press would cooperate with voluntary censorship and upheld this pledge. There was only one complaint filed against an African American newspaper for violating the *Code of Wartime Practices* during World War II.<sup>27</sup>

While the Office of Censorship's voluntary censorship model established a relatively permissive environment for the African American press, it only applied to domestic news. The work of overseas correspondents were subject to the censorship policies and programs of the Army and Navy. The Army and Navy were skeptical of the efficacy of voluntary censorship and developed a system with even more overt controls over not just war correspondents but the organizations that the correspondents reported

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<sup>25</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 3 and US Government, *Report of the Office of Censorship*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> US Government, *Report of the Office Censorship*, 35-36.

<sup>27</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 91.

for. Both the War Department and Department of the Navy attempted to censor domestic newspapers as well as their correspondents, even though domestic censorship was the responsibility of the Office of Censorship.<sup>28</sup>

Military censorship exercised control in several ways. First, the military set screening criteria for its censors. For example, in the European Theater of Operations (ETO), censors screened articles submitted by war correspondents against the following criteria: accuracy in statement and implication; provision of military information to the enemy; potential to negatively impact the morale of American forces, allied forces, and the home front; and potential to embarrass the US, its allies, or neutral government.<sup>29</sup> Second, the accreditation process for war correspondents relied on approval from the military services as well as support for everything from transportation into theater to food, lodging, and security once in theater. A third form of control lay in the fact that war correspondents for the press relied on military communications networks to transmit their stories. The final form of control lie in the desire of correspondents to comply with military regulations and directives in order to avoid offending the officials that they worked with and received support from.<sup>30</sup>

Though the military exercised a greater deal of overt control in its censorship operations, the level of control applied differed greatly in practice depending on theater

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<sup>28</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 82, 95.

<sup>29</sup> 201st Field Press Censorship Organization, *A History of Field Press Censorship in SHAEF during World War II*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Michael S. Sweeney, *The Military and the Press: An Uneasy Truce* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 104-112.



of operations. For instance, in the European Theater of Operations, guidance issued in 1944 proscribed that “the minimum information will be withheld from the public consistent with security.”<sup>31</sup> The China-Burma-India Theater and the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO) had differing standards than those exercised in the ETO, based primarily on the guidance of the theater commanders. By the summer of 1942, both government and military officials agreed that less sanitized and more realistic reporting of the war would serve to further unit the American people and increase support for the war effort.<sup>32</sup> By 1943, one of the lessons learned of military censorship operations was that using war security as a pretext to suppress the reporting of unfavorable news was a “damaging practice.”<sup>33</sup> These factors combined to create a permissive environment for the reporting for war correspondents representing the African American press.

In June 1942, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9182 establishing the Office of War Information. One of the functions of the OWI was to “formulate and carry out, through the use of press, radio, motion picture, and other facilities, information programs designed to facilitate the development of an informed and intelligent understanding, at home and abroad, of the status and progress of the war effort and of the war policies, activities, and aims of the Government.”<sup>34</sup> As part of this function, the OWI sought to

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<sup>31</sup> 201<sup>st</sup> Field Press Censorship Organization, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Sweeney, *The Military and the Press*, 108, 117.

<sup>33</sup> 201<sup>st</sup> Field Press Censorship Organization, 20.

<sup>34</sup> “68 – Executive Order 9182 Establishing the Office of War Information,” The American Presidency Project, accessed 21 April 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=16273>.

increase the understanding of the African American community on the administration's war objectives and the importance of the war effort. The OWI viewed the African American press and the African American clergy as the two primary levers that could provide it influence in the African American community and implemented policies and practices targeting the African American press.<sup>35</sup>

The OWI's assessment of the African American press is that its focus on social equality issues, particularly discrimination in the military and war industry, came at the expense of identifying the threat that the Axis presented to all Americans.<sup>36</sup> The OWI utilized several methods in building influence with the African American press. These methods included targeted information operations, distraction and coercion. Ultimately, the OWI and the African American press entered into a pragmatic partnership that the OWI sought to expand to other government agencies.

Some members of the Roosevelt administration blamed the African American press for contributing to rising racial tensions during 1942 and 1943 and for inciting race-related violence in the summer of 1943.<sup>37</sup> As racial tensions increased, the OWI developed plans for targeted information operations to decrease tension in the specific African American communities. OWI planned one such operation to address racial

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<sup>35</sup> "Report on Activity Related to Negro Morale," Phileo Nash Papers, Box 22, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives, Independence, MO, 1.

<sup>36</sup> "Report on Activity Related to Negro Morale," Phileo Nash Papers, Box 22, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives, Independence, MO, 1.

<sup>37</sup> "Report on Negro Morale," Phileo Nash Papers, Box 20, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives, 13; "Cooperation with the Negro Press," Phileo Nash Papers, Box 6, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives, Independence, MO, 1.

tensions in Ohio in May 1943. This operation would broadcast stories highlighting the actions of African American servicemembers in combat in Canton, Cleveland, and Akron, cities with large African American populations.<sup>38</sup> OWI also acknowledged the effectiveness of efforts by Army Public Relations Division to provide the African American press with an articles and pictures featuring African American soldiers.<sup>39</sup>

OWI also utilized coercion and distraction to mitigate what it considered the negative impact of the African American press's focus on discrimination. One analysis concluded after discussions with the African American press that the publication of accounts of discrimination had a cathartic effect on the African American community by creating a unifying experience that assisted its members in coping with discrimination.<sup>40</sup> The OWI also proposed mitigating racial tension by making "a large number of small concessions in Negro employment, training, upgrading, and in the armed forces..." while the rest of America should be reassured that "...granting small concessions does not imply any intent on the part of the Federal Government to make the largest concession of them all – to break down the pattern of social segregation..."<sup>41</sup> The OWI also utilized coercion to influence the African American press, calling publishers to discuss articles

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<sup>38</sup> Memo, Phileo Nash Papers, Box 19, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives, Independence, MO.

<sup>39</sup> "Report on Negro Morale," Phileo Nash Papers, Box 20, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives, 14.

<sup>40</sup> "Cooperation with the Negro Press," Phileo Nash Papers, Box 6, Harry S. Truman Library and Archives, Independence, MO.

<sup>41</sup> "Memorandum on Negro Situation," Phileo Nash Papers, Box 22, Harry S. Truman Library and Archives, Independence, MO, 1.

that OWI analysts felt that violated censorship regulations. The OWI intended for these discussions to cause these publishers to tone down what it considered inflammatory material published solely to increase circulation.<sup>42</sup>

While the OWI engaged in efforts to coerce the African American press into modifying its content, the FBI engaged in a deliberate effort to suppress members of the African American press that it felt posed a threat to the war effort. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover served as the head of the Justice Department's General Intelligence Division following World War I focused on studying subversive activities which included the radical press. The FBI's approach to identifying subversive activities in World War II followed a similar path. In 1942, the FBI subscribed to every major African American newspapers and reviewed each issue. Agents would visit the offices of those newspapers that the FBI felt was publishing material that hurt the war effort. The first visit of this type occurred in 1940, when FBI agents visited the offices of the *Pittsburgh Courier* after a series of articles examining efforts of African Americans to vote in the South. In 1942, FBI visits to African American newspapers seemed to become a daily occurrence and the press regarded it as "...an obvious effort to cow the Negro press into soft-peddling its criticism and ending its forthright exposure of the outrageous discrimination to which Negroes have been subject."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> "Report on Negro Morale," Phileo Nash Papers, Box 20, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Patrick S. Washburn, "J. Edgar Hoover and the Black Press in World War II," *Journalism History* vol. 13, no. 1, Spring 1986: 26-27.

The FBI also sought to use legal means to suppress African American newspapers that it considered subversive. For more than three years, the FBI submitted articles that it culled from its review of the African American press to the Attorney General's Office for prosecution under the Espionage Act. In 1942, the FBI submitted these requests monthly. In September 1943, the FBI criticized forty-three publications that it assessed had published inflammatory headlines and articles. This included seven African American newspapers, including the *Courier*. By February 1943, Attorney General Francis Biddle declared that the African American press was composed of members loyal to the United States and committed to assisting in the war effort.<sup>44</sup> Despite this statement, the FBI continued to seek indictments against the African American press every three months. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover sent requests for indictments in October 1943, February 1944, June 1944, December 1944, and February 1945 that were not approved.

As accredited war correspondents from the African American press began to deploy overseas in 1942, the objectives of their parent newspapers were clear. However, the environment in which those newspapers operated was undergoing dynamic change due to the interactions between the US government, the African American community, and the African American press. Percival Prattis, the managing editor of the *Courier*, described African American journalists as “fighting partisans” who use “similes and metaphors that lay open the foe's weaknesses and to employ cutting irony, sarcasm and ridicule to confound and embarrass our opponents.”<sup>45</sup> From 1942 to 1945, seven

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<sup>44</sup> Washburn, “J. Edgar Hoover and the Black Press in World War II,” 28-30.

<sup>45</sup> P. L. Prattis, “The Role of the Negro Press in Race Relations,” *Phylon* 7, no. 3 (3rd quarter, 1946), 274.

accredited war correspondents from the *Courier* would go overseas to try to fulfill this expectation.

### CHAPTER 3

#### 1943-1945: THE FIGHT OVERSEAS – THE *PITTSBURGH COURIER'S* WAR CORRESPONDENTS IN ACTION

Seven journalists served as accredited war correspondents for the *Pittsburgh Courier* in the European, Mediterranean, and Pacific Theaters of Operations during World War II. Collectively, the *Courier* published 345 articles under the bylines of these war correspondents, that linked the *Courier's* subscriber base in the United States to the war and African American service members overseas. A textual content analysis of these 345 articles reveals that these correspondents served in the roles described in the “Credo of the Negro Press” by providing material that supported three objectives of the African American press in the fight to gain equal rights for African Americans. The African American press sought to increase the level of support that the African American community offered to the war effort to gain political leverage to use in the fight for civil rights. The *Courier's* war correspondents served as advocates in support of this objective, writing articles intended to increase the African American community's view of their stake in the war against the Axis powers. They also served as heralds, writing human-interest stories that reminded African Americans at home of those serving overseas. The African American press also directed considerable effort towards a second objective, fighting segregation, particularly in the Armed Forces. The *Courier's* correspondents, serving as crusaders for what they felt was right and just, wrote articles that emphasized the ability of white and African American soldiers to accept each other as equals. The third area in which the African American press sought to influence the fight to achieve

civil rights came through documenting positive records of combat service.<sup>1</sup> The *Courier's* war correspondents sought to serve as mirrors and records of African Americans answering the nation's call to service.

African American newspapers were newcomers to the process of gaining US government accreditation for foreign correspondents. The *Courier* was the first African American newspaper to sponsor a war correspondent when it sent Joel A. Rogers to Ethiopia to report on Italian's invasion in 1935. The African American press had to learn how to navigate the bureaucracy of the War Department to gain accreditation of its correspondents. The *Courier's* managing editor, Prattis, felt that a critical qualification that appealed to the War Department was a college education.<sup>2</sup> Many of the African Americans that became journalists following World War I lacked formal journalism training or college education.<sup>3</sup> While the *Courier's* first accredited correspondent, Edgar Rouzeau, was an experienced journalist who had reported on the Army prior to World War II, the journalists that the *Courier* selected to follow him had more diverse backgrounds including college degrees. Ollie Harrington was primarily a cartoonist with a gift for social satire, but he also possessed a degree from Yale University. Randy Dixon was a sports journalist for the *Courier* and possessed a college degree. Collins George was a new journalist who was working in the *Courier's* Missing Persons Bureau but had

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<sup>1</sup> Charles G. Spellman "The Black Press: Setting the Political Agenda during World War II," *Negro History Bulletin* vol. 51, no. 1-12 (December 1993), 39.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Whitaker, *Smoketown* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 158, 179.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Buni, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), 135.



graduated from Howard University. Haskell Cohen graduated from Boston University with a degree in journalism.<sup>4</sup> Billy Rowe did not possess a college degree but was a prominent journalist who reported primarily on the entertainment industry.<sup>5</sup>

From 1943 to 1945, the *Pittsburgh Courier* maintained a dedicated war correspondent in the European Theater of Operations. Randy Dixon spent more than two years overseas, arriving in England in early 1943 and departing in March 1945 after the arrival of Theodore Stanford. In roughly twenty months from January 1944 to August 1945, the *Pittsburgh Courier* published 115 articles under the bylines of these two war correspondents. Analysis of these articles reveal that both correspondents served as advocates, heralds, mirrors and recorders utilizing Kellner's objective reporting and propaganda. However, neither correspondent utilized critical reporting required to serve as crusaders against inequality, despite the interest of the African American press in exposing inequality and the opportunities to observe it in the European Theater of Operations.

As heralds, Dixon and Stanford sought to establish links between the African American community at home and those African Americans serving overseas. Both correspondents composed articles that emphasized the accomplishments, proficiency and important contributions of African American units. The large number of human interest stories pursued and the fact that virtually every article lists the names and hometowns of

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<sup>4</sup> Whitaker, 180-184.

<sup>5</sup> Herb Boyd, "Bill Rowe: a war correspondent, influential columnist, and publicist," <http://amsterdamnews.com/news/2018/may/10/bill-rowe-war-correspondent-influential-columnist-/> (accessed 25 August 2018).

many of the soldiers or Red Cross workers encountered by the author demonstrate some of the methods utilized to accomplish this. Other stories detailed correspondents' encounters with service members who had distinguished themselves as civilians prior to joining the Army, particularly professionals or accomplished college athletes. Multiple articles detailing the arrival of African American nurses in England, the activities of African American Red Cross workers, and the assignment and arrival of an African American unit from the Women's Army Corps into England and then France served as further evidence of the *Courier's* European war correspondents' role as objective reporters.<sup>6</sup> These articles, some as short as one paragraph, provided information on events connected to the war effort in England that held significance and interest for the *Courier's* African American audience.

The final role of the *Courier's* war correspondents in Europe was that of advocates. As advocates, Dixon and Stanford provided material to assist in drawing explicit linkages between the fight against the Axis and domestic gains for African Americans. They also sought to build belief that the war would lead to significant change for African Americans upon its conclusion by linking the African American community to other people of color in the world.

As advocates, Dixon and Stanford attempted to build support for the war effort within the African American community by countering the viewpoint of some that the

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<sup>6</sup> Randy Dixon, "Nurses Assigned," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 30, 1944, 1; Randy Dixon, "ARC Workers Now in France," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 16, 1944, 2; Randy Dixon, "Discord Disappears Among Red Cross Workers," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 25, 1944, 18; Randy Dixon, "GIs Await Negro Wacs," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 17, 1945, 15; Theodore Stanford, "Wac Unit in France," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 2, 1945, 5.

war against Germany was “the white man’s war.” One method that they utilized for conducting this was to emphasize the racism within the Nazi ideology and portray the fight in Europe as the fight to disprove this ideology. In an example of eyewitness reporting published in the June 24, 1944 issue of the *Courier*, Dixon related observing a wounded German prisoner speaking with an African American guard responsible for caring for him. Dixon quoted the German prisoner’s response to an act of kindness from the guard by stating that “I cannot dislike as I was told I must do and as I was taught to do.”<sup>7</sup> More overt examples came later in the summer as the Allied advance across Europe progressed. In an article describing the combat action of an African American field artillery unit, Dixon states that unit was “showing absolute contempt for Hitler’s ‘master race’ divisions...pounding to pieces the theory of ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’ races.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in another article detailing the role of an African American artillery unit in forcing the surrender of a German defensive fortification commanded by a decorated German officer, Dixon writes that “the Negro combat troops who had come to see the surrender...laughed with the satisfaction of knowing they had bested this typical Nazi hero...they had met and defeated the Nazis and in doing so have established themselves as the equal of any artillery unit.”<sup>9</sup> A final example, Stanford penned an article published in June 1945 documenting his observations that German civilians, specifically women,

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<sup>7</sup> Randy Dixon, “Hitler’s Racial Philosophy Defied by German Youth, 16,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 24, 1944, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Randy Dixon, “Artillerymen Blast Germans,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 22, 1944, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Randy Dixon, “Negro Artillerymen Blasted the ‘Mad Man’ of St Malo,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 26, 1944, 5.

did not demonstrate any aversion to speaking to African American soldiers or any preference to speaking to white soldiers over African Americans, stating that “the Nazi ‘superwomen’ seem to look upon all of us, black and white, simply as what we are, Americans.”<sup>10</sup>

Another method that Dixon and Stanford utilized as advocates to influence the African American community to invest in the war against the Axis was in linking the struggle of African Americans to that of other people of color to demonstrate that winning the war would lead to advances on the home front. Dixon provided reports on events concerning Indian and Africans fighting as part of the Allied forces.<sup>11</sup> In more overt writing, in September 1944, Dixon penned an article discussing reports in the British press that reaffirmed the desire to sustain European colonial policies after the conclusion of the war with an extension of colonial holdings to the United States. Dixon decried the lack of “...any concern about moral or ideological forces” in the economic and political calculus of the British as well as the fact that “significantly, all reference to the aspirations and aims of subject peoples as voiced in various war declarations remain unmentioned.”<sup>12</sup> A month later, the *Courier* published an article by Dixon that reported ongoing colonial activity and maneuvering by European nations and commenting on how

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<sup>10</sup> Theodore Stanford, “German Women See Tan Yanks as Men Only,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 9, 1945, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Randy Dixon, “Indians Repatriated,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 30, 1944, 15; Randy Dixon, “Chief Honors Montgomery,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 30, 1944, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Randy Dixon, “U.S., British Imperialists Seek Pre-War Status Quo,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 30, 1944, 10.

African American soldiers over the last two years of the war developed a realization of the relevance of the situation of native populations of European colonial possessions to their own situation.<sup>13</sup> In December 1944, Dixon authored an article intended to further develop an international sense of community within African Americans by reporting a resolution passed by the England-based Federation of Indian Associations that praised those peoples struggling against British imperialism and the French national movement against racial prejudice's recognition of the contributions to the Allied forces by French colonial troops, Jews, African Americans and Australian Maoris.<sup>14</sup> In August 1945, the *Courier* published an article written by Stanford in which he commented on the respect and camaraderie he observed while traveling by ship from Europe to India. His traveling companions included Indian, Afghan, Ghurka, and Sikh troops as well as white soldiers from throughout the British Commonwealth. Stanford remarked upon the welcome that these troops received from the British government upon debarkation in India and wondered if "the sovereign US Stat [*sic*] of Alabama will take the pains to welcome home its heroic Negro veterans in such grand style."<sup>15</sup>

As mirrors and recorders, the *Courier's* war correspondents in Europe also wrote articles designed to highlight the willingness of African Americans to fight and their

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<sup>13</sup> Randy Dixon, "Interest in Colonial Possessions on Upswing," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 21, 1945, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Randy Dixon, "Race Hate Dying-Dixon," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 9, 1944, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Theodore Stanford, "India's Fighter's Find Warm British Welcome," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 4, 1945, 15.

accomplishments in combat. The strategy laid out by leaders of the African American community and the African American press stressed the need for African Americans to serve in a combat role to leave no doubt as to their contributions to victory. Of the twenty-six articles that the *Courier* published under Stanford's byline as a war correspondent, ten of them focused on the exploits of African American combat units. He utilized such hyperbolic language as describing the "brilliant history of the" 784th Tank Battalion, a group of "combat-toughened tankers..." even though the battalion was embarking on only its second combat mission.<sup>16</sup> In another article chronicling the actions of the same unit, Stanford highlighted its skill and courage, providing very little description of their actual actions on the battlefield. He characterized the unit as "the fightingest [*sic*] tank outfit in the European Theater of Operations."<sup>17</sup>

Cognizant of the paucity of African American combat units in the European theater, Dixon also emphasized the accomplishments and courage of African American service units. In an article detailing the hazards faced by units responsible for emplacing communications lines as the battle lines moved forward, Dixon stressed that "every troop in Normandy is a combat troop."<sup>18</sup> In an article that highlighted the role and contributions of African American service units as the Allies advanced into Germany, Dixon advocated the importance of the performance of service units to all African Americans since the

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<sup>16</sup> Theodore Stanford, "784th Tankmen In On Ruhr Cleanup," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 28, 1945, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Theodore Stanford, "784th Wins Battle Honors in Capturing German Towns," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 31, 1945, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Randy Dixon, "Laying Cable Hazardous-Dixon," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 12, 1944, 1.

overwhelming percentage of African American soldiers in the European theater were service troops. Dixon wrote that “we must symbolize the devotion and the enterprise of the tireless truck driver...this otherwise forgotten man may be another one of those Tan Yanks to whom history will have to devote chapters...”<sup>19</sup> To affirm the fighting spirit of African American soldiers, Dixon commented on a ten-day visit to units still staged in England, that he had “yet to encounter a single soldier who has not expressed the wish to be in France and in the thick of the fighting.”<sup>20</sup> In an article published several weeks later, Dixon reported that “scores of eager Tan Yanks in England” volunteered for airborne duty in light of Army decision to expand the airborne forces. Dixon noted that all of these volunteers were serving in service units, though some were in units that had begun as combat units and converted to service units.<sup>21</sup>

As advocates, Dixon and Stanford wrote articles to create a sense of hope and progress in race relations. Dixon and Stanford took every opportunity to emphasize the ability of white and African American soldiers to accept each other as equals. One instance of this is in a feature article on the work of an African American engineer regiment. Dixon leads the article by stating that the regiment’s white commanding officer, a “West Point man with nineteen years of continuous Army service” described the unit as second to none and in his “first contact with colored troops...he is pleased

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<sup>19</sup> Randy Dixon, “Work of Service Troops in France Paces Advance of Allied Armies,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 23, 1944, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Randy Dixon, “Troops in England Eager for Service in France,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 9, 1944, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Randy Dixon, “Tan Yanks Seek Airborne Duty,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 23, 1944, 5.

with his regiment all the way through from top to bottom.”<sup>22</sup> Ted Stanford penned an article in April 1945 describing the praise a white officer lavished on an African American chemical unit that provided obscuration for his unit’s movement across the Roer River.<sup>23</sup> In another article describing the efforts of an African American infantry platoon serving in the 2nd Infantry Division, Stanford writes that he “had grown sort of case hardened to hearing white officers say how much they liked their Negro troops. There doesn’t seem to be much else they can say. But when I got down here I found the white officers praising their Negro infantrymen and the Negro infantrymen praising their white officers to such an extent that I just edged back and let my mouth fall open.”<sup>24</sup> Finally in some of the most significant testimonials, Dixon relayed how the confidence displayed by Brigadier General Leslie McNair in his role as commander of Army Ground Forces, was instrumental in the progress of African American armored units.<sup>25</sup> In June 1945, Stanford published an article detailing the results of an interview with Lieutenant General William Simpson, Commanding General of the US Ninth Army. Stanford relayed that Simpson agreed that African American soldiers performed as well as combat troops as white soldiers if provided equivalent training and equipment, the performance

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<sup>22</sup> Randy Dixon, “Outfit Utilizes Captured Nazi Equipment in Rebuilding Towns,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 19, 1944, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Theodore Stanford, “Ninth Crosses Roer Under Smoke Screen Laid Down By Tan Yanks,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 7, 1945.

<sup>24</sup> Theodore Stanford, “‘Our Boys’ Join Russians on Elbe,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 5, 1945, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Randy Dixon, “Varied Personalities in Tank Unit in England,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 14, 1944, 18.



of African American soldiers justified increased integration into the Armed Forces, and increased reporting of the accomplishments of African American combat units would help build interracial goodwill. Stanford also reported that Simpson did not believe that any fundamental differences existed between African Americans and whites that would preclude them from fighting together. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Stanford's article is his admission that while Simpson primarily responded with simple yes and no answers to statements offered by Stanford, Stanford was able to infer feelings of emphasis and sincerity from Simpson's body language.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, the *Courier's* European war correspondents did not take on the critical aspect of the crusader role highlighted in the Credo for the Negro Press. None of the articles published under their bylines overtly criticized the policies of the US government or military, though some articles clearly advocated for change in the future. An example of what appears to be a conscious decision by the correspondents to avoid assuming a critical role lies in Randy Dixon's coverage of a story focused on military justice, published by the *Courier* on July 1, 1944. In this article by Dixon reported the decision by General Dwight D. Eisenhower to overturn the conviction and sentence of death imposed upon an African American soldier, Corporal Leroy Henry. In a two-paragraph story, Dixon's only comment on the context of this event is a statement that Eisenhower's decision was "certain to send the morale of Negro troops in this theater soaring."<sup>27</sup> In contrast, in the same edition and page, the *Courier* published an article

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<sup>26</sup> Theodore Stanford, "General Simpson Says: Ninth Army Tanks Have Justified Integration," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 30, 1945, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Randy Dixon, "Eisenhower Frees Soldier," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 1, 1944, 1.

written by George Padmore, African American expatriate and pool correspondent, about the same incident. Padmore's two page article not only echoed Dixon's praise of Eisenhower, but described the conviction as "the great wrong" and addressed the larger context of the incident, including a belief that harsh penalties such as this were given overwhelmingly to African American soldiers, the initial conviction for rape despite evidence against such a crime, and the concerns expressed in the British press over the arbitrary and seemingly discriminatory application of military justice by the United States Army, noting the comparison of the British press of this incident to the Scottsboro trial.<sup>28</sup>

Two other examples illustrate the correspondents' decision to engage in objective reporting of facts and events of concern to the African American community without engaging in criticism of the Army. In an article published in the June 3, 1944, edition of the *Courier*, Dixon describes the preparation of African American combat units in England. Specifically, he details African American tank, tank destroyer, field artillery, and anti-aircraft artillery units for the "pending European invasion." Acknowledging the high level of interest and concern about African Americans receiving the opportunity to engage in combat to bolster their claims for social equality, Dixon begins his article by stating that the purpose is "to allay possible apprehensions about the participation of Negro American soldiers in the combat phase of the impending European invasion..."<sup>29</sup> The second example comes in an article published in the August 26, 1944, edition of the *Courier*. The article, a short feature about an African American service unit, introduced it

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<sup>28</sup> George Padmore, "Eisenhower Frees Soldier," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 1, 1944, 1 and 4.

<sup>29</sup> Randy Dixon, "Combat Units for Invasion," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 3, 1944, 1.

as a “unit from the Quartermaster Motor Transport [that] compiled an outstanding record as a combat anti-aircraft outfit...”<sup>30</sup> This referenced a controversial initiative begun the previous year in which the Army converted African American combat units to service units. The African American press widely viewed this initiative as further restriction of opportunity for African American service members. Dixon’s reporting of the positive impact of the unit in its new role as a service unit without discussing the conversion of a tested combat unit demonstrated his decision to serve as an objective conduit of information and forgo the role of critic.

In 1944 and 1945, the *Pittsburgh Courier* also maintained its own war correspondent in the Pacific theater. Billy Rowe, a columnist and photographer, provided coverage of the African American 93rd Infantry Division as it completed its training in California and then arrived on Bougainville Island, New Guinea in early 1944 as the 93rd Infantry Division deployed overseas. Rowe remained in the Pacific theater until December 1945. During 1944 and 1945, the *Courier* published eighty-nine articles under Rowe’s by-line as a war correspondent. An analysis of the content of these articles reveals that Rowe utilized all three types of journalistic techniques, chronicling the war, human interest stories, and eye-witness reports to serve as an objective reporter and propagandist. Like his counterparts in the European theater, Rowe did not take on the role of critical journalist, avoiding overt criticism of governmental policies and practices. However, in several articles he demonstrated awareness of and willingness to discuss government policies of concern to the African American community, specifically the

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<sup>30</sup> Randy Dixon, “Transport Unit Masters Crisis,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 26, 1944, 3.

deployment of African American combat units, conversion of African American combat units to service units and the impact of war-time service on the future of African Americans on the homefront.

Rowe's reporting that advocated support for the war effort is revealing of the audience that the African American press served as well as the attitudes of Americans towards the Japanese. In an article published in August 1944, Rowe reported the collection of several thousand dollars in contributions to the NAACP and the United Negro College Fund by the 25th Infantry Regiment.<sup>31</sup> The expectation that the African American press sift the news in order to identify and report the relevance to the African American community is clearly demonstrated in another article by Rowe that highlighted three African Americans among the thousands of American prisoners of war and civilian internees rescued during the liberation of the Philippines.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, Rowe's reporting was reflective of the attitude of many Americans, regardless of race, towards the Japanese. In *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, John Dower notes that the press reflected the American view of the Japanese as a "racial menace" and tapped into long-held feelings of "anti-'yellow' race hate" from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>33</sup> The African American press also engaged in this practice, as Rowe described the enemy as "a fanatic tribe of

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<sup>31</sup> Billy Rowe, "25th Infantry Regiment Sends \$2,000 to NAACP," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 12, 1944, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Billy Rowe, "Rowe Sees Negroes Freed in Manila," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 10, 1945, 1.

<sup>33</sup> John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 7 and 10.

yellow men” and “quick, savage hordes which spread like a plague from the rot of Japan.”<sup>34</sup> The fact that this description was presented in an article that sought to show that the jungle terrain and weather presented more dangers than the enemy is telling of the high level of acceptance of this characterization of the Japanese. In another article, Rowe characterized the war in the Pacific as Japanese “war lords’ mad dream of world domination.”<sup>35</sup>

With more than twenty-five articles detailing combat action of African American units and servicemembers, almost a third of Rowe’s work reflected his role as a mirror and record. The focus on combat action was reflected in the object of his reporting as the primary units and individuals he wrote about came from the 93rd Infantry Division during his time on Bougainville but shifted almost completely to the exploits of African American service units in support of the invasion of Luzon in January 1945. In his initial article detailing the amphibious landings, Rowe explicitly acknowledged this change in focus by writing that “though no infantry troops are involved in the attack at present, Brown Doughboys are well mixed in as the backbone of combat troops, doing everything from unloading the ships to building airstrips.”<sup>36</sup> Some of this focus was certainly dictated by Rowe’s location on Bougainville as he did detail the accomplishments of African American service members outside of the 93rd Infantry Division during his time

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<sup>34</sup> Billy Rowe, “Jungle Heat and Rain Prove Worse Enemy than Japanese,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 2, 1944, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Billy Rowe, “Engineers’ Glory-Story Is Covered With Mud, Sweat,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 3, 1945, 11.

<sup>36</sup> Billy Rowe, “Billy Row with Tan GIs on Luzon,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 20, 1945, 1.

on Bougainville. In one instance, shortly after his arrival in the Pacific, Rowe filed a story detailing the actions of two African American Coast Guard mess attendants who manned anti-aircraft guns to defend against an attack by Japanese fighters. Rowe based his article on a dispatch received at Bougainville from a Marine Corps correspondent.<sup>37</sup> Several months later, Rowe authored an article detailing the recognition of members of an African American Air Base Security battalion, including the award of the Bronze Star for demonstrated bravery under enemy fire to two African Americans.<sup>38</sup>

Both instances also demonstrate that the focus of Rowe's reporting was not solely dictated by location. For World War II correspondents, information from military officials and commands represented as much of the newsgathering process as personal observations and interviews.<sup>39</sup> While the liberation of the Philippines began in October 1944, Rowe continued to produce articles about the 93rd Infantry Division during this time period. It is difficult to believe that he did not have access to official reports for use in providing coverage of the Philippines campaign from its beginning if desired. In the second instance, while Rowe's article discussed the accomplishments of members of an Air Base Security battalion, several times during the article he attempted to link those accomplishments to the accomplishments of the 93rd Infantry Division, concluding that

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<sup>37</sup> Billy Rowe, "Coast Guard Messmen are South Pacific War Heroes," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 4, 1944, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Billy Rowe, "Two Given Bronze Star Medal; Three Others Cited," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 20, 1944, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph J. Mathews, *Reporting the Wars* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), 192-193.

the “the actions of these soldiers has added both courage and pride to the elements of the 93rd, which now will carry on the bulk of the Tan Yanks’ fight in the South Pacific.”<sup>40</sup>

In his role as advocate, Rowe provided material that reinforced the agenda of the African American press, linking the fight against the Axis with the gain of equal rights for Africa. Rowe sought to influence the attitudes of the *Courier’s* audience in three ways. First, he sought to validate the contributions and performance of African Americans service members by publishing instances of praise from senior military officials. Second, he often utilized hyperbole to magnify the importance of the contributions or level of performance by African Americans. Third, Rowe highlighted numerous instances in which fighting the war brought white and African American soldiers together as equals.

First, seven of the eighty-nine articles that Rowe wrote as a war correspondent highlighted the praise offered by general and flag officers for African American service members. In the first such article while reporting the 93rd Infantry Division’s first combat engagement with the Japanese, Rowe not only cited the approval of both Major General Oscar Griswold, commanding general of the XIV Corps and Major General McClure, but also highlighted the combat experience of both officers.<sup>41</sup> Rowe also published articles detailing praise of African American engineer units offered during an interview with Major General Hugh Casey, chief engineer of the General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific area and Major General Stewart Plank praising the contributions of

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<sup>40</sup> Rowe, “Two Given Bronze Star Medal; Three Others Cited,” 9.

<sup>41</sup> Billy Rowe, “93rd Draws First Blood in Hot Jungle Campaign,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 15, 1944, 1.

African American service units.<sup>42</sup> Not limiting this to the Army, Rowe also penned an article in which Admiral Frank Spruance, commander of the Fifth Fleet, described African American sailors as “...doing a damn good job. They all came to front and center when the time came.”<sup>43</sup> In a final example, the *Courier* published an article in March 1945 with the headline stating that “MacArthur Hails Daring Tan Yanks.”<sup>44</sup>

This last article demonstrates the second way in which Rowe, like many in the African American press, utilized hyperbole to magnify the contributions and accomplishments of African Americans. Despite the headline of the article which read “MacArthur Hails Daring Tan Yanks,” Rowe acknowledged that “...the General did not single them out by names and races but called them his men” while describing MacArthur’s “...tribute to the horde that returned to take the island.” Rowe offered the following caveat to explain his extrapolation of MacArthur’s praise, stating that “the fact that the tan yanks have given great aid to every Pacific operation is accepted without question.”<sup>45</sup> Rowe exhibits the use of hyperbole, sometimes more subtly than other times, almost immediately upon his arrival in the Pacific theater. In his description of the Coast Guard mess attendants who served as anti-aircraft gunners, Rowe compared their actions

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<sup>42</sup> Billy Rowe, “Pacific Engineers Giving ‘Go’ Sign to Armed Force,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 30, 1945, 15; Billy Rowe, “Cites Tan Yanks in Pacific Area,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 25, 1945, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Billy Rowe, “Our Boys with Occupation Troops: Negro Troops on Japanese Soil,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 1, 1945, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Billy Rowe, “MacArthur Hails Daring Tan Yanks,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 10, 1945, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Billy Rowe, “MacArthur Hails Daring Tan Yanks,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 10, 1945, 15.



to the heroics of Dorie Miller.<sup>46</sup> In another instance that demonstrated Rowe's use of hyperbole to exaggerate the actions of African American units, he described the efforts of soldiers in the 93rd Infantry Division to rescue a soldier whose leg was pinned under a fallen tree as heroic. While the actions of the twenty-five soldiers that Rowe listed by name in his article were laudable, Rowe's characterization of this event as demonstrating their heroism is difficult to justify during combat.<sup>47</sup>

As an advocate for racial equality and integration, eleven of the 89 articles that Rowe wrote during this time provided descriptions of African American and white soldiers working together. This both offered evidence of wartime service as a vehicle to social equality and disputed the thought that the war against the Axis was "the white man's fight." In May 1944, Rowe chronicled how "colored troops, now fighting side by side with white infantrymen of the veteran Americal division, went into combat in the jungle almost immediately after serving at Bougainville."<sup>48</sup> In a June 1944 article, Rowe described the efforts of engineers to clear a road in the dense jungle terrain of Bougainville as "... a joint operation with white and colored soldiers working side by side"<sup>49</sup> Two months later, Rowe described the successful capture of a Japanese position

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<sup>46</sup> Rowe, "Coast Guard Messmen are South Pacific War Heroes," 1. Dorie Miller was an African-American Navy mess attendant who received the Navy Cross for his actions in manning an anti-aircraft gun during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Miller quickly became a hero and icon for the African-American community as well as a symbol of the African-American argument that they possessed all of the qualities required to serve in combat.

<sup>47</sup> Billy Rowe, "93rd Heroes Save Man Caught Beneath Tree," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 25, 1944, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Billy Row, "Close to God," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 20, 1944, 9.

by an African American reconnaissance unit after fourteen days of pitched battle, noting that both "...white and colored reconnaissance troops were called in to reconnoiter the area..."<sup>50</sup> The *Courier's* editorial staff reinforced Rowe's point with a headline that stated "Mixed Units in Spectacular Battle."

Rowe also wrote articles that offered promise of an increasing level of social equality among white and African American soldiers. In July 1944, Rowe penned a human-interest story about the entertainment provided by a soldier musical group headlined by an African American soldier, Private First Class William E. Johnson. Rowe described the group as "...spiced with the talent of some of the best musicians in the Army. All white, with the exception of Johnson, each man brought to the service musical spurs won back in the safe world."<sup>51</sup> In another instance, Rowe noted in an article that Captain Dorsey Watson and First Lieutenants John Davis and Jesse Pullien were the first African American officers "...in this area to command both colored and white troops." The importance of African American officers being placed in "direct command of troops of both races, including white and colored officers," was significant enough to rate not only its own article but publication on the front page of the *Courier*.<sup>52</sup> In a final example that transmitted the hope of racial equality and acceptance, Rowe described his

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<sup>49</sup> Billy Rowe, "93rd Pushed Highway Through Dense Jungle," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 3, 1944, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Billy Rowe, "Mixed Units in Spectacular Battle," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 26, 1944, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Billy Rowe, "GI Rhythm Man Airs Own Show in Jungle," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 29, 1944, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Billy Rowe, "Mixed Troops Commanded by Race Officers," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 14, 1945, 1.

experience in discovering a restaurant in Manila whose owner posted a sign forbidding service to African American troops. Rowe noted that the establishment's "Filipino bartender and Chinese cook begged the owner to remove the sign." Several white soldiers that Rowe interviewed stated that "they saw no reason why colored and white troops shouldn't frequent the place. One said: 'We're fighting the same war, ain't we?'"<sup>53</sup>

Like his counterparts in the European Theater of Operations, Rowe did not embrace the critical aspect of the crusader role of the Creed of the Negro Press. Rowe's emphasis on the 93rd Infantry Division's presence and combat performance in the Pacific highlights this. Rowe made references to the 93rd Infantry Division receiving opportunities to prove itself in combat in multiple articles. On March 22, 1944, he referenced reports that the Division's 24th Infantry Regiment was conducting tactical reconnaissance as proof that "...indications point to Negroes soon being used in all phases of battle in the South Pacific."<sup>54</sup> By December 1944, Rowe continued to advocate for the commitment of the 93rd Infantry Division to combat operations, noting that after ten months in the Pacific, "...Tan Yanks are ready, willing and able to take their places on the battle line."<sup>55</sup> A year later, Rowe commented that "...so few colored infantrymen have been pushed through the fighting phases of our two-front war."<sup>56</sup> Despite his

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<sup>53</sup> Billy Rowe, "Filipino Wanted Only White Yanks in Café," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 24, 1945, 23.

<sup>54</sup> Rowe, "Coast Guard Messmen are South Pacific War Heroes," 1.

<sup>55</sup> Rowe, "Ready and Willing to Take Positions on Pacific Fronts," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 23, 1944, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Rowe, "Engineers' Glory-Story Is Covered With Mud, Sweat," 11.

apparent resignation to the lack of combat opportunities for the 93rd Infantry Division, Rowe chose to shift his emphasis to advocating for importance of the contributions of service units rather than offer any criticism of the Army's decisions on employment of the 93rd Division.

Rowe's treatment of the topic of the conversion of African American combat units to service units follows a similar pattern. Even before departing the United States for the Pacific, Rowe demonstrated his awareness of the concerns of the African American community over these conversions. In an article written while he provided coverage of the 93rd Infantry Division during training, Rowe sought to dispel rumors by stating that "...the 93rd Division has not been broken up...The 93rd is a completely rounded and outfitted combat division."<sup>57</sup> As the war drew close to its conclusion, Rowe reported the arrival of an African American service engineer regiment from the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. This unit was a product of the conversion of the 366th Infantry Regiment after a much-debated performance in combat during the Allied campaign in Italy. While Rowe detailed the combat accomplishments of the 366th Infantry Regiment, he did not even mention the controversial circumstances that led to the unit's conversion much less offer any criticism of the Army's decision to conduct the conversion.<sup>58</sup> Rowe's lack of criticism of the Army actions did not prevent the editorial staff of the *Courier* from utilizing his work as part of its criticism. In May 1944, the

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<sup>57</sup> Rowe, "Pin-up Girl of the 93rd Division," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 8, 1944, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Billy Rowe, "Converted Engineers First to Leave MTO," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 11, 1945, 4.

*Courier* published an article by Rowe detailing comments made by Major General Robert McClure, commanding general of the Americal Division, praising the performance of soldiers in the 93rd Infantry Division. Published as a sidebar to this article was another article lacking a byline that used the comments of Major General McClure to refute assertions offered by Secretary of War Henry Stimson several weeks earlier that “Negro units...have been unable to master efficiently the techniques of modern weapons.” Stimson made these assertions as part of an explanation for why African American combat units had not been deployed for combat duty and were being converted to service units. The concluding sentence of this article clearly stated the *Courier's* criticism of the stance of the War Department, stating that “perhaps Mr. Stimson consulted the wrong Georgia general before making his statement. Those who are in position to know seem to disagree with him!”<sup>59</sup>

In 1944 and 1945, three war correspondents represented the *Pittsburgh Courier* in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. Edgar Rouzeau completed a multi-year tour overseas in February 1944 and Ollie Harrington served as the *Courier's* accredited correspondent from March through September 1944. Haskell Cohen, a white journalist working for the *Courier*, replaced Harrington from October 1944 until February 1945 and Collins George reported from the Mediterranean theater from March through June 1945. During this time period, the *Courier* published 141 articles under the bylines of these three war correspondents.

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<sup>59</sup> Billy Rowe, “General McClure Says Troop Expert at Modern Warfare,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 13, 1944, 1; “What Did You Say About Negroes, Modern Weapons, Mr. Stimson?” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 13, 1944, 1.

An analysis of the content of these articles reveals that these three correspondents, much like their counterparts in Europe and the Pacific, primarily served as heralds communicating news of interest to their specific audience. As mirrors and recorders, they reported on the actions of African Americans during combat operations. As advocates, they wrote articles that sought to demonstrate that African American were stakeholders in the war effort and argued that military service broke down racial barriers. However, unlike their counterparts in the other two theaters, Harrington and George embraced the critical aspect of the crusader role, expressing disagreement with US Army racial policies.

More than 80 percent of the *Courier* articles published from the Mediterranean theater provided objective reporting on the events of the war, almost exclusively focused on the 92nd Infantry Division and 332nd Fighter Group, both African American units. While this reporting featured many articles detailing the exploits of individuals and units in ground and aerial combat, it also revealed the specific interests of the African American community. In an article detailing the accomplishments of soldiers in the 92nd Infantry Division awarded Silver and Bronze Stars, Cohen specifically identified three of the soldiers as white and did not report the actions of the white soldier awarded the Silver Star.<sup>60</sup> In another article published a month later, Cohen reported the combat awards earned by forty-two soldiers in the 92nd Infantry Division and again specifically identified five soldiers as white.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, in March 1945, Collins George reported the

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<sup>60</sup> Haskell Cohen, "Fourteen Win Awards with 92nd in Italy," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 25, 1944, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Haskell Cohen, "42 Members of 92nd Decorated for Bravery," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 30, 1944, 1.

award of combat decorations to soldiers and also specifically identified Lieutenant Colonel Edward Rowny, recipient of the Silver Star, as a white soldier.

The herald role that African American correspondents embraced is reflected in reporting on such things as the activities of African American Red Cross workers that otherwise may not have seemed newsworthy. In May 1944, Harrington reported on the opening and décor of a new Liberty club by the American Red Cross.<sup>62</sup> In December 1944, Cohen reported the arrival of two African American Red Cross workers to the 332nd Fighter Group's base of operations.<sup>63</sup> In March 1945, Collins George reported on the visit to the 332nd Fighter Group by an African American Red Cross worker that warranted not only a speech but the attendance of both the group commander, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. and the commander of the 332nd's higher headquarters.<sup>64</sup>

As objective reporters, the *Courier's* Mediterranean correspondents sought to relay the war's events to their readers even in the absence of information provided through official Army channels. In December 1944, Cohen wrote an article to "...explain the weekly communique of the 92nd Division which continues to read: 'The situation along the front remains generally unchanged.'" Cohen described how elements of the 92nd Division captured an intermediate objective and described the restrictions presented

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<sup>62</sup> Ollie Harrington, "Red Cross Opens New Liberty Club in Italy," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 6, 1944, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Haskell Cohen, "ARC Girls in Italy," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 2, 1944, 5.

<sup>64</sup> Collins George, "ARC Worker Spurs Morale of Mustang Fighter Group," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 24, 1945, 9.

by the rugged terrain and entrenched defenses of Axis troops.<sup>65</sup> In March 1945, George wrote that “with a static front in Italy, communiques for weeks have been confined to ‘There was patrol activity.’ Yet as any GI can tell you, behind that simple statement lie as many tales of heroism and daring as in the stories of a great push.” George’s article goes on to tell the story of Staff Sergeant Winthrop Hector who volunteered to lead a patrol to destroy an enemy position and Private First Class Coleman Moore who exposed himself to enemy fire to rescue Hector when he stepped on a land mine.<sup>66</sup>

As advocates the *Courier* published nineteen articles under the bylines of its Mediterranean correspondents that sought to bolster the African American press’ campaign to rally African American support for the war effort by linking the war and future civil rights gains. In an article expressing his lack of success in locating an African American artillery unit, Rouzeau reported the opinion of one white non-commissioned officer that he encountered who stated that African Americans were not capable of operating field artillery weapons. Rouzeau stated that “The white man is dying and...safeguarding the democratic rights of his children.” He asked, “But what if a future generation of white should refuse to accord these rights to our children and grandchildren on the ground that the sacrifice made by Negro soldiers in this war were not enough to procure the same brand of democracy for which the white man paid with his life?” Rouzeau exhorts African Americans to “Insist on the right of the Negro to shoulder a gun

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<sup>65</sup> Haskell Cohen, “92nd Takes ‘Georgia,’” *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 2, 1944, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Collins George, “‘Patrol Activity’ Covers Sacrifice and Bravery,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 24, 1945, 19.



with the white American, and if necessary, die beside him.”<sup>67</sup> In March 1944, Harrington reminded the *Courier's* readers that “...men are dying here in the Italian mud.” He then relayed a conversation he had with an African American officer who told him that he would “go to hell and back to for them [his wife and infant son] and I’ll be damned if they’re ever going to have to ride jim-crow trains again.”<sup>68</sup>

A second way that the *Courier's* Mediterranean correspondents attempted to increase the African American community’s stake in the war effort was by reporting the racist components of the Nazi ideology. In June 1944, Harrington reported the results of an engagement between African American fighter planes and fighter planes from the Luftwaffe. “...ME-109s flown by ‘pure Aryan supermen’ swept up from their airdromes to battle the Negroes whom the Fuehrer described in his Nazi bible, Mein Kampf, as ‘inferior brutes, incapable of mastering even the most elementary machines.’”<sup>69</sup> In January 1945, the *Courier* published an article from Cohen, detailing the various messages aimed at specific groups of soldiers by Nazi Germany. Cohen detailed how the German propaganda targeting African American soldiers focused on segregation and economic disparities in the United States. Based on his interviews with African American soldiers, Cohen concluded that the Nazi propaganda had no effect, noting that “As for the racial angles presented by the Krauts the colored soldiers just don’t go for it. It’s quite

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<sup>67</sup> Edgar Rouzeau, “‘Insist on Combat Duty’ – Rouzeau,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 1, 1944, 1,4.

<sup>68</sup> Ollie Harrington, “‘War Has Leveling Influence on Racial Bars’ – Harrington,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 11, 1944, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Ollie Harrington, “Met Foe Over Hitler’s Retreat,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 17, 1944, 1.

true that the lot of the colored soldier might be better but it isn't going to be improved by Hitler and Co.”<sup>70</sup>

As advocates, the Mediterranean correspondents attempted to demonstrate that wartime service led to improved racial relations. While reporting on the 99th Pursuit Squadron's success in destroying Axis supply lines in Italy, Harrington stated "...that Negro pilots form an integral and highly squadron in one of the hottest pursuit groups in the world. All the other ships are flown by white pilots in the closest co-operation and with the finest spirit of comradeship imaginable... a glorious monument to what fierce, hard fighting democracy can accomplish..."<sup>71</sup> In December 1944, Cohen reported how African American soldiers in the 92nd Division built relationships with the local population of an unnamed Italian village, despite the fact that "before leaving Germans told the people that the colored troops eat babies."<sup>72</sup> In March 1945, George relayed the sentiments of a white bomber pilot when meeting the African American fighter pilot who saved his aircraft from a German fighter attack. The white officer, a relative of the governor of the state of Mississippi, "begged the slender Negro pilot to visit him in" Mississippi. "'Nobody's going to hurt you there' he said, 'I'll see to that. There's nothing

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<sup>70</sup> Haskell Cohen, "Courier's Haskell Cohen Finds German Propaganda Leaflets Have No Effect on 'Our Boys' at the Front," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 6, 1945, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Ollie Harrington, "99th in Thick of Big Italian Push; Wrecks Enemy Supplies," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 10, 1944, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Haskell Cohen, "Men of 92nd Win Hearts of Italians with Kindness," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 30, 1944, 9.

in my home state that's too good for you fellows and I intend to see that the folks back home know that.”<sup>73</sup>

The African American press did not subscribe as strongly as the mainstream press to “a widespread conviction that the press had a patriotic obligation to avoid whenever possible, taking a slant on the news that might erode civilian or military morale or reflect negatively on American institutions” that was “...strongly ingrained into the journalistic ethos of [World War II].”<sup>74</sup> Unlike their counterparts in the European and Pacific Theaters of Operation, the *Courier's* Mediterranean war correspondents embraced the critical aspect of the crusader role expected of African American journalists by openly criticizing US Army policies. Harrington wrote several articles critical of the attempt by the Army and Red Cross to separate blood donations based on race of the donor. Collins George wrote multiple articles criticizing segregation and racial prejudice in the 92nd Infantry Division.

In May 1944, Harrington reported on the large number of soldiers overseas responding to calls for blood donations. In his conclusion, he stated, “there were no labels on this blood. If there had been, they would have read simply ‘Democracy’s Blood.’”<sup>75</sup> Three weeks later, Harrington wrote in another article that he “talked with many

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<sup>73</sup> Collins George, “Keys to Mississippi Offered Flier Who Saved Dixie Pilot,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 24, 1945, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Frederick V. Voss, *Reporting the War: The Journalistic Coverage of World War II* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press for the National Portrait Gallery, 1994), 174.

<sup>75</sup> Ollie Harrington, “‘No Blood Label at the Front’ – Harrington,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 27, 1944, 1.

men...black men, white men and brown. I wondered what they thought about the fact that blood for their wounded buddies was not being kept 'pure.'...I was startled by the ferocity with which they answered and I felt proud and gloriously hopeful for America and the world."<sup>76</sup> Harrington was clearly criticizing the US Army Surgeon General's request that the Red Cross keep blood donations from white and African American separated.

Collins George published multiple articles critical of the impact of the Army's segregation policy and the racial prejudices that the policy fostered on the effectiveness of the 92nd Infantry Division. In March 1945, George described segregation as a "travesty on Democracy" as "segregated fighting units of the American Army...have had their victories...whatever good his record may show, that record would be indescribably better, if it were not for the American-imposed burden of racial separateness..."<sup>77</sup> Two weeks later, George wrote an article that stated, "there is no doubt that the 92nd Division is the finest fighting group that Maj. General Edward Almond can make it, but...one of the major difficulties in making it a truly great division has been...the existence of race distinctions among officer personnel."<sup>78</sup> Finally, on April 28, 1945, the *Courier* published an article written by George detailing an interview with Major General Lucian Truscott, Commanding General of Fifth Army. George questioned Truscott's rationale for ordering

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<sup>76</sup> Ollie Harrington, "Combat Troops Destroy Blood Bank Evil," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 17, 1944, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Collins George, "Bias Perils 92nd Morale," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 10, 1945, 1.

<sup>78</sup> Collins George, "Army Policy Blamed for Record of 92nd," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 24, 1945, 28.

the conversion of the African American 366th Infantry Regiment into two General Service Engineer regiments. George pointed out that the US Army was soliciting African American service units for volunteers to undergo infantry training due to a shortage of infantry replacements while the conversion was taking place.<sup>79</sup>

There can be no doubt that the *Pittsburgh Courier's* accredited war correspondents during World War II were civil rights activists as well as journalists. Their reporting was emblematic of the advocate, herald, and mirror roles articulated in the "Credo of the Negro Press." However the credo clearly expresses an expectation for critical reporting, an expectation that five of the seven correspondents struggled to meet. Ending discrimination in the Armed Forces was one of the primary objectives of the African American community. War correspondents from the European and Pacific Theaters of Operations offered little criticism of discriminatory policies and practices despite observing them at close-range.

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<sup>79</sup> Collins George, "366th Broken Up," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 28, 1945, 1.

## CONCLUSION

The first African American newspapers were founded in the early nineteenth century to generate support for the abolitionist movement.<sup>1</sup> More than 75 years after the end of slavery, African Americans found themselves in pitched battle, fighting for equal rights. The African American press placed itself at the fore-front of this fight during the interwar period and decided not to put the fight against discrimination on hold during World War II. The African American press sought to mobilize the support of the African American community for the war, demonstrate the contributions of African Americans in combat, and show that segregation ill-served a nation at war in hopes of capitalizing on this after the war. However, the African American press's most significant contribution to the long civil rights movement may have been unifying and nationalizing the African American community's fight for equal rights.

The *Pittsburgh Courier's* accredited war correspondents in the European, Mediterranean, and Pacific Theaters of Operations during World War II carried this fight overseas. These correspondents primarily provided a linkage between African American service members serving overseas and the African American community in the United States. They also sought to actively generate and maintain support from the African American community for the war against the Axis. However, the *Courier's* war correspondents did not engage in the critical journalism that domestic journalists of the African American press often practiced.

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte O'Kelley, "Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement: Their Historical Relationship, 1827-1945," *Phylon* 43: no. 1 (1st QTR, 1982), 1.

Areas that require further examination in assessing the roles of these war correspondents is the impact of various influences such as the *Courier's* publishers and editors and military censors. The role of military censors is particularly relevant to any assessment of any war correspondent's willingness to offer critical commentary of the military or the war. During World War II, the Office of Censorship relied on voluntary compliance with guidelines published in the *Code for Wartime Practices by the American Press*. The Office of Censorship only cited one instance of a violation of these guidelines by an African American newspaper, an article published by the *Chicago Defender* in 1944.<sup>2</sup> Both the War Department and Department of the Navy established extensive military censorship operations that screened all correspondents' work against four broad criteria: accuracy, possibility that the story would provide military information to the enemy, negative impact to the morale of US forces, Americans at home, or allies, and potential for embarrassing the US, its allies, or any neutral nations.<sup>3</sup> Little to no primary source material exists other than the published writings for these correspondents. These very real constraints prevent us from being able to assess any chilling effect on the willingness of these correspondents to offer critical views.

Significant work in this area is still required, despite the limitations and constraints of reconstructing the conditions that impact the work of war correspondents. A more complete picture of the role of war correspondents in the African American press is available if the work of freelance correspondents such as George Padmore and Roi Ottley is considered. A comparison to correspondents from mainstream press may help

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<sup>2</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 88-91.

<sup>3</sup> 201st Field Press Censorship Organization, 19.

determine if there truly was a requirement for a separate African American press that reported on newsworthy items that would otherwise not get reported. A closer examination of the context in which the *Courier's* editors placed the work of war correspondents when publishing their articles as well as a comparison between the headlines and article content will provide a clearer understanding of the interactions of these journalists and their editorial staff.

A broader examination of the African American press, incorporating multiple newspapers from across the country would show if the *Courier* truly serves as an exemplar for the entire African American press or if it is an outlier. While there are works that survey the African American press from its inception in 1827 through the 1960s and other works that focus on the African American press during World War II, these do not provide the focus required to ascertain the place of the African American press in the genesis of the long civil rights movement. Combining a broader geographic focus with the limitations of the 25 year period between the end of the World War I and the end of World War II would also allow for an analysis of any differences between African American communities in the American west when compared to the south.

Members of the African American press fought for changes that they felt would benefit their entire race. While many agreed with their positions, the changes that they sought were by no means universally agreed upon by every member of the African American community. Journalist Enoch Waters described an encounter that he had with African American soldiers while serving as a war correspondent in the Pacific Theater of Operations in 1943. "I was accosted by an angry GI waving a *Defender* clipping in front of me...it was an editorial attacking the Army's Jim Crow policy...it contended that



more [blacks] should be placed in combat units as an indication of fairer treatment...’I don’t know who you folks think you are speaking for, but it certainly ain’t us. You folks are sitting back there safe at home and too old or too beat up to be drafted. It’s easy to say let them fight and die.’...Before long I was confronted by a growing group of soldiers shouting their disapproval of the paper’s stand.” Waters wrote that he was “astounded. It was the first time in my life I found myself the center of a group protesting the policies of the paper for which I worked.”<sup>4</sup> A more in-depth study of the various attitudes that existed in the African American community would provide improved context in which to place the work of African American war correspondents.

There can be no doubt that the *Pittsburgh Courier’s* staff at home and its accredited war correspondents during World War II were civil rights activists as well as journalists. Their reporting was emblematic of the advocate, herald, and mirror roles articulated in the “Credo of the Negro Press.” The role of crusader proved more difficult for some. The complex landscape of censorship, press accreditation, military support and their own feelings of patriotism most likely impacted these correspondents’ ability to offer criticism. Despite this, there is no denying the impact of their contributions to establishing the long civil rights movement.

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<sup>4</sup> Waters, 389.

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